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Iraq rejects Kuwaiti call for apology

DOHA (AFP) — Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf on Wednesday turned down calls for an apology over his country's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, saying any reconciliation with Gulf states had to be unconditional. "He who wants to reconcile does not impose conditions," Mr. Sahhaf told a press conference in the Qatari capital, referring to Kuwaiti and Saudi calls for an apology from Baghdad. Mr. Sahhaf, who took part in an Islamic ministerial conference which ended Tuesday, said Iraq wanted to make use of its "popular Arab support" during the crisis over U.N. arms inspections "to restore Arab unity." It also wants to "settle problems left over" from the 1991 Gulf war when Iraqi forces were evicted from Kuwait, he said.

Netanyahu tries to prevent U.S. peace initiative

TEL AVIV (AFP) — After angrily rejecting a European initiative to break the deadlock in talks with the Palestinians, Israel Wednesday sought to prevent the United States from also going public with its ideas for saving the peace process. Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu sent two senior envoys to Washington to carry the message that a public push by the United States to force concessions from Israel would not work, Israeli radio and television reported. The envoys, Mr. Netanyahu's diplomatic advisor Uzi Arad and Trade and Industry Minister Nathan Sharansky, left Tuesday for Washington, they said. Mr. Sharansky was due to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and members of Congress, the radio said. Danny Naveh, an aide to Mr. Netanyahu, confirmed that Mr. Arad and Mr. Sharansky were in Washington but would not comment on their mission.

Regent, Annan focus talks on human dimension of peace, visit refugee camps

Annan voices support for Regent's call to establish Mideast conflict resolution centre

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan discussed Wednesday the stalled Arab-Israeli peace process and stressed that human conditions are the pillar of peace making.

"We share the same concern about the human conditions, as they relate to the future of peacemaking in this region," Crown Prince Hassan said.

Mr. Annan supported the setting up of a regional centre for conflict resolution and peaceful resolution of controversies in the Middle East, a project long advocated by Prince Hassan.

"I support the idea to bring people together to discuss issues of common concern and look beyond national borders and look at the region," Mr. Annan said.

Refugee issues were central to the talks between the two leaders, who made an unscheduled morning visit to Al Hussein refugee camp which houses Palestinian refugees from the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, and *Al Hattin* refugee camp, near Zarqa, home to Palestinians who were forced to flee their homes in the 1967 war.

In the camps, blanketed by the sudden snowfall that hit Jordan yesterday, the Regent and Mr. Annan spoke to the people in the streets, visited schools, clinics and homes.

Jordan Television showed a very affable Prince Hassan introducing the secretary general to camp residents, both surprised and ecstatic at the unexpected visit.

Prince Hassan said it was important "particularly in this wet weather to visit people without any prior planning," as his discussions with Mr. Annan were focused on "the humanitarian dimension of peace making, a leading principle to peacemaking.

"These people demand their right to return, which the Jordanian government fully supports. At the same time, we want to be able to maintain living conditions and to ensure their full participation in society and life. The focus is about human beings and I am delighted to have the secretary general with us here to see for himself and to interact with people at all levels."

Jordan is home to more than 1.35 million refugees registered with the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The agency counted another 800,000 Palestinians as either displaced persons from, or following, the 1967 war, and returnees who were forced to flee Gulf countries because of the 1990 crisis.

U.N. Resolution 194 upholds their right to return and/or compensation, but Israel insists such right be recognised only to those who were physically present in war areas in 1948 and 1967.

Their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Hassan and Princess Sarvath and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and Nane Annan, his spouse, are welcomed by at a Palestinian family's home during their tour at the Hitteen refugee camp on Wednesday (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Accompanied by HRH Princess Sarvath and Nane Annan, the secretary general's spouse, as well as Peter Hansen, head of UNRWA and Ibrahim Badran, director of the Department for Palestinian Affairs, the Regent and Mr. Annan listened to the people's grievances, enquired about their every-day life and drank tea in a camp home.

"I came to see for myself and to know how to do more," Mr. Annan told reporters, expressing appreciation for His Majesty King Hussein's continuous efforts to assist refugees and struggle for their rights and "applauding the Jordanian government and the Jordanian people for the work [they] are doing."

"I like what I have seen: you have done a lot in very difficult circumstances and I express my admiration and support," he added.

Jordan and UNRWA are under a great financial pressure to assist the refugees.

UNRWA has been several times on the verge of suspending its relief projects in education and health due to a chronic deficit.

Mr. Annan pledged he will "continue to work with Mr. Hansen and other colleagues to raise the necessary funds to provide the necessary support."

Addressing a press conference later in the day, he

(Continued on page 3)

King urges U.S. to adopt balanced policy in Mideast

WASHINGTON (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein last night called on the United States to adopt a fair and balanced position towards all parties in the Middle East peace process, saying that such a position will contribute to establishing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

During a meeting with the Chairman of the Senate's External Affairs Committee, Jesse Hill, and committee members, King Hussein stressed the need for intensifying efforts to get the peace process back on track. He outlined the important role the U.S. can play in this respect.

King Hussein discussed with Sen. Hill and the committee members bilateral relations and scope of cooperation in the political, economic and military fields.

Mr. Hill said his country understands Jordan's development and military needs, and is keen on meeting them to enable Jordan to boost its economy and play its full role in enhancing regional peace and stability.

King Hussein also discussed with Sen. Hill and his committee the agreement signed last month between Iraq and the United Nations. The two sides stressed the importance of full compliance with the agreement in preparation for lifting the sanctions imposed on Iraq since 1990.

Also on Tuesday night, King Hussein met with Heads of the Foreign Aid Committees at the U.S. Senate and Congress and discussed bilateral relations with them. The committee's heads stressed the need to continue providing financial aid to Jordan to enable it to pursue its overall development efforts.

The King was expected to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and senior State Departement officials later Wednesday.

Talks would focus on the Mideast peace process and means of overcoming the current impasse, according to Jordan Television reporter Kassab Samawi.

The meetings were attended by Their Royal Highnesses Prince Abdullah, Prince Faisal, Royal Court Chief Fayez Tarawneh, Director of the State Security Council Prince Talal Ben Mohammad, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Jawad Anani, Planning Minister Rima Khalaf, Jordan's Ambassador in Washington Marwan Muasher and the U.S. Ambassador in Amman Wesley Egan.

Snow, rain expected through Friday

AMMAN (J.T.) — Snow blanketed Amman and other parts of the Kingdom Wednesday disrupting public transport and prompting the government to shut down public offices, schools and universities, and forcing the Lower House of Parliament to postpone a session that was scheduled for Wednesday morning.

The Public Security Department (PSD) and the Civil Defence Department (CDD) were on the scene employing their road-clearing equipment to open main roads, offering help to stranded citizens on the highways and dealing with flooded homes in low lying districts.

Meanwhile, the Department of Meteorology on Wednesday forecast more rain throughout the country and more snow on areas rising at least 700 metres above sea

It said that the khamsinic weather that affected the eastern Mediterranean zone was followed by several cold fronts of polar origin, thus causing a sharp drop in temperatures and the blizzard which also hit Palestine, Israel, Lebanon and Syria.

Temperatures are expected to reach four degrees Celsius during the day and to drop to zero at night said the Department of Meteorology which noted that temperatures at this time of the year normally average between 13 and 17 degrees Celsius.

According to the department, a slight improvement in weather conditions will occur on Friday but the weather will remain cold and more rain will fall in most regions.

The department said that snow fall in March is not a rarity especially if occurring

which normally lasts from March 15 to May 10 each year.

Meanwhile, the director of the Queen Alia International Airport Mahmoud Taha said that flights continued on schedule and were not really affected as a result of the snowstorm. However, he said that there were slight delays in departures of some flights due to the late arrival of the passengers at the airport.

As for the Amman Airport in Marka, services and flights continued as normal.

Reports from Salt, Jerash, Ajloun and other parts of the northern region said that many of the roads were blocked with snow but work was underway to reopen them for traffic.

The CDD had urged the public early Wednesday to refrain from going out in their

Condemning Israeli policies again

U.N. General Assembly urges holding conference barring Israeli settlements

EU 'deplores Israel's failure to respond' to U.N. appeals

UNITED NATIONS (R) — The General Assembly issued a new condemnation on Tuesday of Israel's failure to stop building on occupied territory south of Jerusalem and again called for a conference of parties to a Geneva Convention barring such settlements.

The vote, at a resumed emergency session of the 185-nation assembly, was 120 in favour and three against — Israel, the United States and Micronesia. Five countries — Australia, Bulgaria, Romania, Marshall Islands and Swaziland — abstained. The session was convened last April when a resolution was adopted demanding that Israel abandon plans to build 6,500 settlement-units at Jabal Abu Ghneim that it occupied in 1967.

Israel continued with the project and the session was reconvened in July and again in November.

Resolutions condemning Israel's settlement activities were adopted at each of the three previous meetings by more than 130 votes. Each time Israel, the United States and Micronesia cast the only negative votes.

Work on Jabal Abu Ghneim and attacks on Israeli targets by activists helped deadlock the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

In its latest resolution, the assembly "reiterates its condemnation of the failure of the government of Israel" to comply with the previous resolutions.

It repeated calls for a conference of the 188 parties to the fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in time of war, which bars settlements in occupied territory.

The conference would consider "measures to enforce the convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem" and ensure its respect.

The resolution again recommended that Switzerland, as repository of the 1949 Convention, convene a meeting of experts by the end of April to prepare for the conference.

Similar requests were made in the assembly's November resolution, which called for an experts meeting by the end of February 1998 that did not occur.

Switzerland proposed instead a closed meeting of experts from the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Israel, Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to discuss improving the application of humanitarian law in the Israeli-occupied territories.

The new resolution reiterated that "in case of continued lack of compliance by Israel," the assembly "shall reconsider the situation with a view to making further appropriate recommendations."

The PLO's U.N. observer, Nasser Al Kidwa, said Israel was "the only state officially considered by the Security Council to be an occupying power" and the only one to reject the applicability of the fourth Geneva Convention to the territories occupied since 1967.

"Israel is the only country in the world that is engaged in settler colonialism at the end of the 20th century," he said, adding that "settlement activities represent a direct violation of basic components" of agreements

(Continued on page 3)

Cook calls for Israeli pullout from Lebanon as part of settlement

BEIRUT (AFP) — British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook arrived here on Wednesday and said he hoped for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon as part of a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement.

Mr. Cook, who arrived in Beirut from Damascus, where he held talks with Syrian President Hafez Al Assad, said he had embarked upon a "very appropriate visit to Lebanon because it comes on the 20th anniversary of U.N. Resolution 425."

Resolution 425, passed by the U.N. Security Council in 1978, calls for Israel to conduct an immediate and unconditional troop withdrawal from neighbouring Lebanon.

"We would like to see Resolution 425 implemented but in the context of a comprehensive settlement," Mr. Cook told reporters at Beirut airport, where he was met by his Lebanese counterpart Fares Bwiez.

Mr. Cook said that while in Israel he had discussed the possibility of an Israeli withdrawal from the "security zone" set up by the Jewish state in southern Lebanon with Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

"I did discuss with Mr. Mordechai the approach of the government of Israel to the withdrawal of forces from south Lebanon," he said. "I have discussed the matter further in Damascus."

Israel has offered to withdraw from the buffer zone set up to protect its northern border in exchange for guarantees that the Lebanese army will rein in Hezbollah guerrillas.

Damascus, which is the main powerbroker in Lebanon with more than 30,000 troops there, and Beirut have both rejected the Israeli offer and demanded an unconditional Israeli pullout.

Mr. Cook also said he expected Washington to unveil a proposal soon to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, deadlocked for the past year.

"We are in very close contact with the United States and we expect them

(Continued on page 3)

Cook's visit to Israel: fiasco or crafted bid to pave way for U.S. peace drive?

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli officials Wednesday presented British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's tumultuous visit to a Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem as a diplomatic blunder that had damned European hopes for a key role in the peace process.

But others saw a calculated bid by Britain to underscore the international isolation of Israel's right-wing government and pave the way for a long-awaited U.S. initiative to break the deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts.

Mr. Cook paid a one-day visit to Israel and the Palestinian areas Tuesday, ostensibly to promote an European Union (EU) peace plan which presses Israel to carry out major troop withdrawals from the West Bank and freeze settlement building in exchange for greater Palestinian action against terrorism.

But even before presenting the ideas to Israeli officials, he sparked a diplomatic row with his hosts by meeting a Palestinian official at the planned site for a new Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu accused Mr. Cook forviolating an agreement to visit the site at Jabal Abu Ghneim, known as Har Homa by Israelis, only with Israeli officials and angrily cut short his meetings with the British diplomat.

Wednesday, Israeli officials claimed the incident illustrated a pro-Arab bias in Europe and undercut EU ambitions in the peace process.

"After Cook's visit, we think that Europe has even less of a mediating role to play in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians," said David Bar-Illan, Mr. Netanyahu's media advisor.

"The Europeans systematically adopt the Palestinian positions," he told AFP, adding that Washington remained the only viable mediator.

The right-wing Jerusalem Post newspaper scored Mr. Cook's visit as a series of "miscalculations, misjudgements and mistakes" that had "dealt a severe blow to the European Union's efforts at gaining Israel's confidence."

But others said Mr. Cook was well aware before arriving that his EU initiative was a non-starter — Mr. Netanyahu has always made clear he saw no mediating role for Europe in the Palestinian negotiations and in any case had already rejected the EU proposals.

Mr. Cook's stubborn insistence on riling his hosts over Jabal Abu Ghneim thus seemed calculated to illustrate the depth of international frustration with the deadlock in the peace process and show Israel there was a diplomatic price to pay for Mr. Netanyahu's intransigence.

"We are in total isolation — all countries have the same views [as Cook] and the Netanyahu government is to blame," said Yossi Sarid, head of the leftist Meretz Party.

Mr. Cook's actions were all the more galling for Mr. Netanyahu — a master of public debate and media relations — in that he travelled to London and other European capitals earlier this month and came home claiming to have once again mended fences and headed off pressures for Israeli concessions.

"Netanyahu came back from Europe spreading the illusion that everything was fine, that he had conquered Europe, and now look at the results," Mr. Sarid said on Israel Radio.

Palestinian officials who met with Mr. Cook Tuesday said he presented his actions as designed to prepare the way for more effective pressure on Mr. Netanyahu by Washington, Israel's main ally and financier.

"There is not an EU initiative, they are supporting a U.S. initiative," said Saeb Erekat, the chief negotiator with Israel.

He said Mr. Cook told Mr. Arafat that EU special envoy Miguel Moratinos would visit Washington on March 20 to brief the Americans on Mr. Cook's visit and coordinate over a U.S. initiative which could be announced late this month.

U.S. President Bill Clinton is reportedly considering going public with a plan which would require Israel to withdraw from an additional 13 per cent of the West Bank within three months in tandem with specific actions by the Palestinians to combat terrorism.

Mr. Netanyahu sent two senior envoys to Washington Tuesday to warn that any such U.S. initiative would meet with the same steely response as Mr. Cook's Jabal Abu Ghneim adventure, Israel media reported.

Truce panel urges Israel to spare civilian property in Lebanon

NAQOURA (AFP) — The international committee monitoring the ceasefire in south Lebanon called Wednesday on Israel to avoid harming civilian property in Lebanon.

"The Monitoring Group urged strongly that Israel, or those cooperating with it, take every precaution to assure that civilian property not be damaged in the course of their military actions," the committee said in a statement.

It said four shells fired by Israel or its allied South Lebanon Army militia slammed Friday into the village of Haddatha in south Lebanon, "damaging a mosque, five houses and other property, including part of the electrical system."

The committee had been meeting since Tuesday at the United Nations headquarters in the border town of Naqoura to examine a complaint filed by Lebanon over the shelling.

The committee monitoring the April 1996 ceasefire agreement is composed of representatives from France, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and the United States.

Under the terms of the accord, Israel and the Islamist Hizbollah militia agreed to avoid attacking civilians on either side of the border or launching attacks from civilian-inhabited areas.

Turkey defends incursions into Iraq

DOHA (AFP) — Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem has defended Ankara's military incursions into northern Iraq in pursuit of Kurdish rebels and said it had no intention of invading its Arab neighbour's territory.

"We are not invading northern Iraq. We are defending ourselves against operations" by the separatist Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), he said, quoted by the London-based Arab newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat on Wednesday.

The Turkish army has been retaliating to PKK incursions from Kurdish-held northern Iraq. Mr. Cem said, on the sidelines of an Islamic ministerial meeting in the Qatari capital.

He reiterated that Ankara's military accord with Israel was not aimed at other states. "I understand and respect the sensitivities and reservations of these countries, and I assure them the accord does not target them," he said.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al Sharaa has said he called for Turkey to reconsider its military ties with Israel, at a meeting he held with Mr. Cem on Sunday in Doha.

The two foreign ministers agreed "to work to improve bilateral relations and pursue contacts," said Mr. Cem, whose country's political dialogue with Damascus has been suspended since September 1995.

Ankara accuses Damascus of supporting the PKK, while Syria protests that Turkey is limiting the amount of water flowing down the Euphrates River into its territory.

Turkish students clash with police, 13 injured

ANKARA (AFP) — Hundreds of leftist students protesting against lengthy prison terms sought for colleagues clashed with security forces in downtown Ankara Wednesday and 13 people were injured, police said.

The protesters hurled stones at police forces trying to disperse the demonstration, injuring 11 policemen and civilians and two journalists covering the incident, the police said.

The security forces arrested scores of students, the police said.

This was the worst act of violence in a demonstration in Ankara this year.

The protesters were denouncing a state security court decision in January to sentence eight students to prison terms of between four and 18 years for staging an anti-government protest in parliament.

But Turkey's high court of appeals overruled the verdict Wednesday, asking the state security court to retry the suspects.

The high court of appeals ruled that the previous court decision was based on insufficient evidence.

A masked Palestinian Wednesday pours oil on a hanging effigy of Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu before setting it alight during a protest at Rafah in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians were protesting against the Israeli policy of Jewish settlements (Reuters photo)

Slain Egyptian militants wanted for deaths of 40 people

MINYA (AFP) — Four Islamists killed in a police shootout this week had participated in attacks that claimed the lives of 40 people, police sources said on Wednesday.

The militants were killed Monday in the southern Egyptian province of Minya after a gunbattle with police which lasted more than five hours. A nine-year-old boy and a police recruit were also killed in the shootout.

The four were identified as Samir Abdelmotleb, 27, Hatem Taghiyan, 28, Mohammad Khalifa, 26, and Mohammad Abuzeid, 25, who used fields where wheat and fava beans are grown as a hideout, the sources said.

They were killed when police laid siege to the fields. The four men refused to surrender and traded fire with the security forces; they said.

The Islamists were responsible for "terrorist attacks" which killed 40 policemen and civilians, including alleged police informants, and left 16 people wounded, they said.

One police source said Abdelmotleb was a "dangerous criminal wanted in connection with 16 terrorist attacks," while Taghyan was known for his "brutality."

Khalifa, a student at the faculty of agriculture in the northern province of Zagazig, capital city of the eastern province of Sharqiya, was wanted in connection with 12 killings in the town of Abu Qurqas.

Abu Zeid was wanted in connection with seven deadly attacks.

An initial police report on Monday said the four were members of Egypt's main armed Gamaa Islamiya.

Police have killed 10 key Islamists in raids since March 9.

Islamic commission struggles to improve human rights in Iran

TEHRAN (AFP) — An Iranian commission is waging an uphill battle to improve human rights in the Islamic republic, where the authorities often reject the notion as a "political ploy" invented by the West to discredit countries which go their own way.

The commission, set up three years ago by a group of judges, MPs and lawyers, is sympathetic to the Islamist regime, but it seeks to spot and remove human rights violations from society.

"There are widespread violations here. Our aim is to help human rights. Torture and violence have no affinity with Islam," said the head of the commission, Mohammad-Hassan Ziai-Far.

He said the commission had received 2,450 complaints in the past year, half of them from women and 50 per cent against the police.

As an example, he complained about the "numerous" detention centres run by different government organisations. "It is painful for me to say that we are suffering a great deal because of these centres," he said.

He said he was pushing to have a unified network of prisons, a task which he said will take a long time to achieve, "although we continue to supervise."

The commission has investigated the cases of several journalists and dissidents arrested for criticism or alleged spying.

It has also probed complaints from religious minorities, notably the Bahaiis, who are banned from practising their faith and are subjected to discrimination.

The commission has begun to educate police and security officers as well as prison guards and judges about "international and Islamic concepts of human rights."

It has pushed to have human rights principles taught in police academies, inserted in school textbooks, and debates aired on television.

Volunteers are to be recruited to work as human rights activists and periodicals will be published on the subject.

"We are after a cohesive, lawful and organised system to investigate and prove violations," Mr. Ziai-Far said, urging journalists to inform his commission of such cases.

He said the commission is in contact with international rights groups to share experiences.

"We do not want to create a conflict between the Western notion of human rights and the Islamic one. We are after common ground. Human rights do not know borders. You cannot draw a fence around it," the activist said.

Iranian officials have in the past stated that certain aspects of human rights principles accepted in the West do not conform to Islamic teachings, which often call for tough punishments for offenders.

But he said he was opposed to a decision by the U.N. human rights commission to assign a special rapporteur to investigate violations in Iran.

"Our country is one with a great civilisation. It is an insult to have us placed in the same group with countries with a heinous human rights record," Mr. Ziai-Far said.

He accused certain organisations of politicising the human rights issue and pleaded with them to engage in "sincere" cooperation.

"Investigations tainted with politics only hurt the cause and expose us to accusations like we are a tool of outsiders," Mr. Ziai-Far said.

But he said the U.N. rapporteur on Iran, Maurice Copithorn, may visit Iran this summer, despite anger here over his previous negative reports.

Mr. Ziai-Far insisted the commission was sincere in its efforts to correct the rights situation in Iran. "Before I took the job, I made sure it was serious," he said.

Iran has considerably opened up since President Mohammad Khatami took office in August. The president has established a [illegible] mittee to protect citizens' rights.

An unprecedented debate has been raging in the Iranian media as to whether a number of municipal officials arrested for corruption were tortured during detention.

U.N. Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson, who visited Iran last month, said she detected a "new trend."

Palestinian police stop youths stoning Israeli soldiers in Gaza

RAFAH (AFP) — Palestinian police stopped youths from pelting Israeli soldiers with stones Wednesday during a march to protest the killing of three Arab workers by soldiers last week, witnesses said.

Several dozen Palestinians joined in the march in the town of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, called by the youth movement of the Fateh faction of the PLO to denounce the "crimes of [Israeli Prime Minister] Benyamin Netanyahu.

They marched through the town, shouting slogans against Mr. Netanyahu and the killing on March 10 of three Palestinians by Israeli soldiers who opened fire on their van at a West Bank checkpoint.

The protesters marched towards the Gaza-Egypt border and began throwing stones at an observation tower manned by Israeli soldiers there.

But Palestinian police quickly intervened to push the youths away, witnesses said.

The killing of the three workers sparked a week of riots in the West Bank between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian protesters which left one child dead and over 100 youths injured by Israeli rubber-coated bullets.

16 students killed in Iran bus crash

TEHRAN (AFP) — Sixteen medical students, all women, were killed when their bus collided head-on with a trailer truck in southwestern Iran, the second deadly accident [illegible] 24 hours, the official IRNA news agency reported Wednesday.

The crash occurred late Tuesday on a road in Khuzestan province, it said. Three other people accompanying the students were also killed and many others injured.

The students were from a university in the northwestern city of Mashhad, visiting former fronts during the 1980-1988 war against Iraq.

Late Monday, seven award-winning mathematicians were killed along with two drivers when their bus turned over in [illegible]

The victims, including one who had won the gold medal at an international Olympiad, were students at Tehran's Sanati-Sharif University, a high-caliber technical school in Iran.

The Iranian media has given wide coverage to the accident and Iranian leaders sent messages of condolences over the "painful loss."

Gulf states boost air defences to offset shortage of ground forces

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Gulf Arab states have drawn up a [illegible] air forces in a bid to offset a shortage in troops because of their small indigenous populations, defence analysts said here Wednesday.

The plans run parallel to expansions in other military fields and an ongoing conscription drive triggered by the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and fears over Iran.

"There is an ongoing drive in Gulf countries to strengthen their defences but the focus [illegible]," a defence expert said at an international arms show in Abu Dhabi.

"According to my contacts with the military in this region, most of them have drawn up long-term programmes to bolster their air forces by buying advanced aircraft to make up for their relatively small ground forces."

The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, whose military might is in sharp contrast with their oil power, currently have more than 550 fighters and 200 attack helicopters.

The number of jets is set to exceed 750 in the next few years, as Riyadh plans to buy up to 100 U.S.-built F-16 fighters and Abu Dhabi will get 30 new French-made Mirages, plus some 80 other sophisticated jets it plans to order.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION
Tel. 773111-19
PROGRAMME TWO

Thursday Programmes
14:10 .. Cartoon — The Dinky Di's
14:30 Doc. — The Animal Show
15:00 ....French Programmes
17:00 ....NBA
18:00 ....Drama — The Burned Bridge
19:00 ....Le Journal
19:15 Science Magazine — A Tomes Cruchus
19:30 ....News Headlines
19:35 Comedy —Big Brother Jake
20:00 Drama — The Great Romances
20:30 Drama — Dr. Quinn, the Medicine Woman
21:10 The Oprah Winfrey Show
22:00 ....News in English
22:25 Feature film — "Hearts Adrift"
23:59 Comedy — Never The Taiwan
00:30 ....End of T.X.

Friday Programmes
14:10 Cartoon — The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin
14:30 ....Wishbone
15:00 ....French Programmes
17:00 ......He Shoots, He Scores
17:30 Doc. — Blue Water Dreaming
18:00 ....Tarazan
19:00 ....Le Journal
19:15 Educational Programme — Allo La Terre
19:30 ....News Headlines
19:35 ....Friends
20:00 Documentary — Life on the Internet
20:30 The American Chart Show
21:10 The Adventures of Brisco County
22:00 ....News in English
22:30 ....Mini-series: Gone in the Night (Pt. II)
00:30 ....End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES
04:20 ....Fajr
05:38 ....(Sunrise) Duha
11:43 ....Dhuhr
15:10 ....'Asr
17:49 ....Maghreb
19:07 ....'Isha

CHURCHES
St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh. Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811.
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4623541
Church of Presentation, Sweifieh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4629852
The Armenian Catholic Church 771331

WEATHER
Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

The effect of the cold air mass will continue today. Skies will be cloudy with rainy conditions prevailing, winds westerly moderate to active, and snow falling over mountainous areas with altitudes more than 700 metres above sea level. The effect of the cold air mass will gradually diminish during the day, but it will continue to be cold and cloudy with winds northwesterly moderate. On Friday, temperatures will rise slightly. In Aqaba, it will be partly cloudy, rainy, winds northerly active and seas choppy.

Amman Zero/06
Aqaba 09/17
Deserts 01/12
Jordan Valley 07/15

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 06, Aqaba 16 Humidity readings: Amman 84 per cent, Aqaba 50 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Abbas Al Hakim 865446
Dr. Arafat Al Ashhab 5602507
Dr. Ayman Al Muhtaseb 67748
Dr. Jamal Jbarah 847351
Firas pharmacy 5661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy 4637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 4623672
Al Salam pharmacy 4636730
Yacoub pharmacy 4644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 4637660
Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Fawzi Abul Haija 252970
Al Quds pharmacy ....
ZARQA:
Dr. Ya'coub Al Khatib 9917720
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES
Food Control Centre 4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade 4617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Co. 4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS
AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic, Abdli 5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 856813, 856656
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6
Akileh Maternity 4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir 775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5602240/50
Amal Hospital 5674155
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital ....(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital ....(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital ....(09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital ....(09)900990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital ....(02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital ....(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital ....(02)247100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified.

Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44 (53250).

ARRIVALS
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:15 ....Sanaa (RJ)
08:25 ....Bombay (RJ)
09:15 ....Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:30 ....New Delhi (RJ)
10:05 ....Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:05 ....Beirut (RJ)
10:40 ....Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:45 ....Colombo (RJ)
15:00 ....New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:25 ....London (RJ)
17:00 ....Jeddah (add) (RJ)
17:20 ....Moscow (RJ)
18:05 ....Athens (RJ)
18:05 ....Kuwait (RJ)
19:10 ....Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
19:20 ....Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)
22:50 ....Larnaca (RJ)
01:00 ....Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights
13:15 ....Riyadh (SV)
14:10 ....Shariqah (AH)
15:00 ....Doha (QR)
15:20 ....Muscat, Doha (GF)
16:00 ....Dubai (EK)
16:30 ....Rome (AZ)
20:00 ....Tel Aviv (MS)
20:10 ....Beirut (ME)
20:40 ....Cairo (MS)
23:10 ....Istanbul (TK)
23:30 ....London, Beirut (BA)

Royal Wings (RW)
(For Thursday and Friday)
07:45 ....Aqaba (RW)
09:05 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:20 ....Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20 ....Aqaba (RW)
22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:20 ....Beirut (RJ)
07:25 ....Moscow (RJ)
10:50 ....Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
11:00 Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
11:30 ....Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:00 ....Jeddah (RJ)
12:05 ....Kuwait (RJ)
12:10 ....Paris (RJ)
12:15 ....London (RJ)
12:20 ....Athens (RJ)
19:35 ....Larnaca (RJ)
20:00 ....Jeddah (add) (RJ)
20:10 ....Cairo (RJ)
20:30 ....Jeddah (RJ)
23:00 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)

Other Flights
00:35 ....Amsterdam (KL)
03:00 ....Athens (OA)
06:40 ....Beirut, London (BA)
08:00 ....Beirut (ME)
11:20 ....London (BA)
14:45 ....Riyadh (SV)
15:00 ....Algiers (AH)
15:55 ....Doha (QR)
16:20 ....Abu Dhabi, Doha (GF)
17:00 ....Muscat, Dubai (EK)
17:30 ....Rome (AZ)
21:20 ....Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 ....Cairo (MS)
08:00 ....Beirut (ME)

Royal Wings
(For Thursday and Friday)
06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
08:15 ....Aqaba (RW)
09:30 ....Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:55 ....Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30 .... Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50 ....Aqaba (RW)

Queen, Majali meet with UNU/ILA board

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor chaired a meeting with Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and the Vice Chair of the United Nations University/International Leadership Academy (UNU/ILA) Advisory Committee, Hisashi Owada, in New York, according to a press release Wednesday.

Queen Noor, who chairs the UNU/ILA's Advisory Committee, discussed the format and selection process of the academy's second 1998 International Leadership Programme, as well as the 1999 Advanced Leadership and Global Leadership Travel programmes.

The Queen noted that the 1998 International Leadership Programme will introduce introductory training courses on creativity and leadership skills conducted by the "Centre for Creative Leadership" in the United States. She emphasised the importance of increasing scholarship opportunities for participants from developing countries, the statement said.

Norway, Arab Bank, the UNDP and the UNFPA have offered UNU/ILA scholarship to candidates from developing countries, while a number of countries supported their candidates at last year's International Leadership Programme.

The International Leadership Programme is a four-week course that will comprise interactive seminars and workshops on issues of peace, security and global leadership challenges between 60 participants selected from throughout the world and international keynote speakers. The speakers will include current and former leaders, high-level United Nations and government officials, scholars, heads of political parties and directors of international organisations. The programme will also involve a field study component of travel to different regions of the world, according to the statement.

The Advanced Leadership Programme is an eight-week in-depth training programme for a group of 20 participants selected from the 1997 and 1998 Leadership Programmes. The participants will focus on a particular global issue, take part in independent research and conclude with a thesis that will be submitted to the academy.

The Global Leadership Travel Programme is a pioneering/experimental four-month programme that will comprise a preliminary two-week session in Amman, followed by travel to Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America.

According to UNU/ILA Director Adel Safty, the participants will "engage in activities, seminars and visits to various leaders in government, civil society, academic and social institutions." Upon their return to Amman, the participants will prepare and submit a dissertation based on their research and experiences, the announcement read.

The International Leadership Academy, which is based in Amman, is the first global leadership training facility as well as the first U.N. institution to be initiated and established in the Middle East. The academy co-sponsored an International Conference on Mediation and Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland as well as a Global Leadership Week at the University of Maryland last November. It is working in cooperation with the International University in Islamabad and a group of UNU/ILA alumni to prepare the First Regional Leadership Conference in Islamabad. The UNU/ILA seeks to provide training in leadership skills and attitudes, while fostering commitment to sustainable development and democracy, civil society institutions, and peaceful resolution of disputes, according to the statement.

The rector of the United Nations University (UNU), Hans van Ginkel, and Dr. Safty attended the meeting with the Queen.

Rifai meets with Yemeni president at parliamentary union meeting

SANAA (Petra) — Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh on Wednesday received Jordanian Senate Speaker Zeid Rifai and the delegation accompanying him to the 31st meeting of the Arab Parliamentary Union (APU), which is being held in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa.

Mr. Rifai conveyed condolences from His Majesty King Hussein to Mr. Saleh on the death of former Yemeni President Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al Iryani.

He also met Yemeni Prime Minister Faraj Ben Ghanem, with whom he discussed Jordanian-Yemeni cooperation and reviewed the APU's meetings, which have been dedicated to enhancing Arab solidarity toward the protection of Arab Jerusalem.

Mr. Rifai stressed the importance of Arab solidarity, which he said is needed in the face of the looming dangers in Palestine, the challenges facing the Arab and Muslim nations, and the deadlock in the peace process resulting from Israel's intransigence and disregard for signed accords.

The Senate speaker expressed Jordan's hope for stronger relations with Yemen.

In his address delivered on Jordan's behalf to the APU meeting, Mr. Rifai said Israel's measures in the occupied Arab territories of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon constitute a flagrant violation of international legitimacy and U.N. resolutions and open the door for an escalation of violence in the region.

Mr. Rifai said Israel's refusal to implement its peace agreements was behind the present deadlock and the instability in the whole region.

He voiced Jordan's demand that the sanctions imposed on Iraq, Libya and Sudan be lifted because, he said, they are detrimental to people and contravene human rights principles.

Noting that King Hussein has repeatedly called attention to the dangers inherent in Israel's settlement programmes and its drive to alter the character of Arab Jerusalem, Mr. Rifai said the Arab World must immediately undertake concerted action to deal with the situation.

Irbid man stabs wife, 4 children to death

AMMAN (Petra) — A 30-year old man from Kura in Irbid governorate Wednesday killed his 28-year-old wife and four children and afterwards surrendered himself to the police.

The man, identified as A.K., stabbed to death his wife, identified as F., and his four children, aged eight, seven, five and three years.

The five bodies were taken to Princess Basma Hospital for autopsy to define the cause of death. Examination showed stab wounds in various parts of their bodies, according to hospital reports.

Asked about the motives behind his crime, the man said he killed them out of desperation, adding that he was unable to support his family, and that he thought of killing them more than once.

Germany grants JD8 million toward social programme

AMMAN (J.T.) — German Ambassador Peter Mende and Acting Minister of Planning Nasser Lawzi Wednesday signed an agreement which provides a German financial contribution of JD8 million to the Social Productivity Programme, according to a German embassy press release.

The measures of the programme aim at improving the living conditions of some 140,000 people living in areas within and near Amman. The programme areas belong to the housing areas defined by the Jordanian government in consultation with the World Bank as having a high rate of poor households, thus being in particular need of infrastructure improvements, the statement said.

The activities will comprise, among other things, the construction of water supply and wastewater networks and streets and footpaths, as well as the expansion and rehabilitation of schools and community centres.

The amount JD8 million is part of the JD24 million Germany presented to Jordan in 1997. Generally, Jordan has been one of the main beneficiaries of German economic cooperation, with an overall amount of nearly JD800 million, most of which was spent on projects in the water and irrigation sector, the announcement read.

Following the signing of the agreement, Mr. Lawzi voiced Jordan's deep appreciation to Germany for its continued backing of development projects, particularly the government-sponsored plan to improve the infrastructure of the poor districts that His Majesty King Hussein announced toward the end of the past year during a visit to the Ministry of Planning.

The German grant, he said, was the first commitment by a donor nation toward implementing this vital project.

According to the government plan, a total of JD431 million will be spent on infrastructure services in poor districts and refugee camps over the coming few years.

For his part, Mr. Mende said the grant aims at helping the Jordanian government improve the living conditions of the citizens living in the underdeveloped regions.

"We want the people of Jordan to know that Germany and the European Union are very concerned over helping Jordan carry out economic development schemes, and we are always ready and we will carefully study all Jordanian requests towards this objective," Mr. Mende said.

Ministry of Planning officials and German embassy staff were present at the signing ceremony.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Polio immunisation campaign extended

AMMAN (Petra) — The nationwide polio immunisation campaign that started on Saturday has been extended by two days due to the inclement weather conditions prevailing in the Kingdom. The campaign, which was supposed to end today, has so far reached 90 per cent of the target group, children under the age of five.

Cabinet endorses appointment of new officials

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Cabinet on Tuesday endorsed the appointment of Ihsan Ramzi, former director general of Jordan Radio and Television Corporation (JRTVC), as secretary general of the Ministry of Information, succeeding the late Mohammad Amin, according to a report in Al Ra'i. The Cabinet also endorsed the appointment of Nasser Judeh, director of Jordan Television, as director general of JRTVC, and the appointment of Mahmoud Fadeel Tal as secretary general of the Ministry of Culture.

what's going on

FILMS

* "The Heifer" at Institut Cervantes, Jabal Ammar, on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

* "Italian Architecture in Rome and Venice since AD 1600 — Age of the Baroque, and a Visit to the Classical Art Museum of Florence" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday March 19 at 5:30 p.m. (presented and commented on in Arabic by Dr. Mazen Asfour).

* "Dances With Wolves" at the American Center, Abdoun, on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

LA FRANCOPHONIE WEEK

* Screening of a variety of French films (with subtitles in Arabic) at Greater Amman Municipality, Ras Al Ain on Thursday at 8:30 p.m.

* Drawing competition at the Greater Amman Municipality on Friday at 10:00 a.m.

* Opening of an exhibition by artist Dani de Cobert at Greater Amman Municipality, Ras Al Ain on Friday at 5:00 p.m. Also presenting a lecture by the artist at 6:00 p.m.

LECTURE

* "Desert Castle" by Dr. Fawzi Zayadeen at the premises of the Friends of Archaeology (Tel. 593068) at 7:00 p.m.

CHARITY BAZAAR

* First charity bazaar by Nafin Society at its headquarters in Hashmi Al Shamali, Zaghlat quarter, Bathi Street, until March 21.

SNOWMAN IN AMMAN: Four men take advantage of the snow left by the storm that hit Amman overnight Tuesday-Wednesday to build a snowman. The storm virtually shut down the capital, closing schools and government offices. More snow at high elevations is predicted for today, along with rain in other locales (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Archaeology group promoting public awareness through local, international outings

By Nadia Mukhlis
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — As part of efforts to raise society's awareness on the need to protect the country's archaeological heritage, the Friends of Archaeology (FOA) organise local and international trips, according to Rana Naber, member of the FOA administrative committee and media spokesperson.

Last year, the FOA conducted archaeological, cultural, historical, religious, environmental and geological camping and overnight trips, including camping trips to Dana Wildlife Reserve and Wadi Rum, Ms. Naber said.

Two other overnight trips to the city of Aqaba and Petra were organised, Ms. Naber added.

The home excursions included educational trips, which have the goal of involving both children and adults in learning experiences, she said.

One outing took participants to the Citadel archaeological museum, where Nelly Lama, an art critic and an education committee member, toured the group.

A trip was also organised to the ancient Roman city of Pella, where Richard Tanner, a geography teacher at Amman Baccalaureate School and an education committee member, divided the participants into three groups to try and determine the number of people that lived in the ancient city, she explained.

As for international trips, the FOA sponsored two last year to Syria, where the participants visited the ruins of Palmyra, Bosra, Sweda, Qanaawat and Ezraa, and to China, where the group of 47 members visited Beijing, Xian and Guilin, Ms. Naber said.

The FOA also conducted several other activities last year, all aiming at raising societal awareness on the need to protect the archaeological wealth of Jordan, Ms. Naber said. A total of 29 lectures were presented by professors and professionals working in the field, all focusing on archaeological subjects such as conservation, restoration, environment and geology.

Moreover, the FOA publishes bi-monthly English and Arabic newsletters that compile items of publications, excavations and archaeological reports and serve as an informative resource for members, archaeological institutions, universities and other interested individuals and institution, she said.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and with funding by the Canadian embassy, the FOA is currently implementing a media awareness project consisting of television commercials focusing on the importance of protecting the rich cultural heritage of Jordan, Ms. Naber said.

The centre also has a library housing books, reports, reviews, newspaper clippings and maps that is expanding due to generous donations by members, Ms. Naber concluded.

Regent, Annan focus talks on human dimension of peace, visit refugee camps

(Continued from page 1)

launched an impassioned appeal "to all governments with capacity to give to give, freely and generously so that we can continue to provide assistance to the refugees.

"The international community should do more than speaking."

The secretary general was here on the first leg of a 10-day "goodwill" tour of the Middle East which took him to Cairo later yesterday and will continue to Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian self-rule areas and Israel.

"I will be discussing the peace process, including of course the question of refugees and their conditions," he said.

Mr. Annan said he will try to push the peace process forward by "encouraging all parties concerned to have the courage, the wisdom and the vision to make the compromises necessary to attain peace and work with the mediators in making that possible."

Israeli-Palestinian talks have been stalled since last March.

The U.S. was planning to propose an Israeli withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank, in order to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table.

"I support the efforts of the U.S. government, and I encourage the parties to work with them constructively, in a practical way, and speedily, to find a solution before matters get worse," Mr. Annan said.

U.N. General Assembly urges holding conference barring Israeli settlements

(Continued from page 1)

between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israeli Ambassador Dore Gold said there had never been a conference of the parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, even when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, while Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip stemmed from a defensive war.

He said the Palestinian National Authority had chosen a "deliberate strategy of constant crisis," seeking through international pressure "not land for peace, but land for nothing."

U.S. Ambassador Bill Richardson said the resolution would "complicate, not enhance, Middle East peace efforts."

He said Switzerland's proposal for a meeting of Palestinian and Israeli experts under the auspices of the ICRC was in harmony with the basic premise of the peace process — "that the parties themselves must discuss their differences in direct, face-to-face negotiations."

Britain's Sir John Weston, speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU), said it "deplores Israel's failure to respond" to appeals "to cease construction work in Jabal Abu Ghneim/Har Homa" and to suspend the development of settlements in the occupied territories.

Cook calls for Israeli pullout from Lebanon as part of settlement

(Continued from page 1)

to come forward with a plan soon on the Palestinian track," he said.

Mr. Cook, who is representing the 15-nation European Union and is accompanied by EU special envoy to the Middle East Miguel Moratinos on his regional tour, left from the airport for the foreign ministry for talks with Mr. Bweiz.

Before travelling to Beirut, the British foreign secretary met in Damascus with Mr. Assad and his Syrian counterpart Farouq Al Shara.

He called in the Syrian capital for a quick resumption of peace talks between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

"We want peace talks to resume as soon as possible," Mr. Cook told reporters. "It is a tragedy that we have lost so much time."

Syrian-Israeli peace talks have been frozen for two years with Damascus insisting the Israeli government honour a reported agreement in principle by the previous Israeli administration to withdraw from the occupied Golan Heights.

The Jewish state occupied the strategic plateau during the 1967 Middle East war and illegally annexed it in 1981.

Mr. Cook also repeated a call on Israel to stop expansion of Jewish settlements in Palestinian territories, saying they were an obstacle to peace.

While in Israel on Tuesday, Mr. Cook sparked a diplomatic incident with the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu by meeting Palestinian officials at the site of a controversial Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem.

Mr. Shara, the Syrian foreign minister, described the uproar over Cook's visit to the Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement site as "concrete proof that Israel doesn't care about peace in the Middle East."

Mr. Cook also angered Mr. Netanyahu by pressing an EU initiative which calls on Israel to freeze settlement building and carry out major West Bank troop withdrawals.

The British foreign secretary is scheduled to return home from Beirut after a tour which has taken him to Syria, Israel, the Palestinian territories, Egypt and Jordan.

Britain is the current president of the 15-nation European Union and Mr. Cook has been accompanied during his tour by the EU special envoy to the Middle East, Miguel Moratinos.

Kosovo's Albanians pin faith in non-violence

PRISTINA, Serbia (R) — Ethnic Albanians took to the streets in their thousands in the Serbian province of Kosovo Wednesday, convinced that non-violent protest is the key to winning autonomy and perhaps even independence.

"Non-violence is working for us. We have achieved more in the past three weeks than was achieved in three years of war in Bosnia," said Shaban Buza, an engineer in Pristina, the Kosovo capital.

"World politicians are focused on our situation. The Russian foreign minister, the American secretary of state, leaders from France and Germany — all are working for a peaceful solution in Kosovo. This path is much better than war."

Ethnic Albanians comprise 90 per cent of the province's 1.8 million people.

Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic revoked Kosovo's once considerable political autonomy in 1989, an act usually regarded as the opening move in former Yugoslavia's violent dissolution.

The Yugoslav republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia won their independence in a series of wars fought against Belgrade between 1991 and 1995.

Kosovo remained peaceful throughout that turbulent period, led by Ibrahim Rugova, whom some here compare to India's Mahatma Gandhi or South African leader Nelson Mandela because of his dedication to non-violence.

While Mr. Rugova has spared Kosovo the trials of war, there is some question as to whether he has moved the province closer to independence or even to a restoration of autonomy.

Street demonstrations in Kosovo are carried out with a patience and precision born of experience.

When several thousand Kosovo Albanian women set out Monday on a 45 kilometres march from Pristina to Drenica, where Serb paramilitary forces have surrounded a rural separatist stronghold, they were soon stopped by a phalanx of police.

With scores of international reporters looking on and at least a dozen television cameras rolling the women could have chosen to provoke the Serbian forces into attacking them and scored a huge propaganda coup.

Instead, they reversed direction and marched back into town in silence and with a discipline that would have brought a smile to any army drill instructor's face.

"For better or for worse I think that street demonstrations here have segued from rebellion into ritual," said one Western observer who asked not to be named.

"You have to ask yourself how effective the tactic is at this point. Joe Stalin was not moved by non-violent protest. Gandhi succeeded because he was dealing with a democracy, and a militarily weary one, in Great Britain."

Analysts say the recent swell of international attention towards Kosovo has been caused not by non-violent protest in places like Pristina but by attack and counter-attack in the Kosovo countryside.

The Kosovo liberation army, a group of unknown strength that had been staging hit and run attacks on Serb police, stepped up its activities in 1998 and finally provoked a bloody Serbian crackdown in early March.

At least 80 ethnic Albanians, including 25 women and children, have been killed by Serb paramilitary forces in the Drenica area over the past three weeks.

That violence, and the fear it might spread not only within Kosovo but across international borders and involve ethnic Albanians in neighbouring Albania and Macedonia, is what triggered the flurry of international concern.

The first three Yugoslav wars of this decade suggest that ethnic Albanians looking to the outside world for a solution to their problems as a reward for non-violence may be bitterly disappointed.

Containment has always been more important to the international community than intervention in the Balkans.

That left ethnic minorities within Serb-dominated former Yugoslavia with the alternatives of resorting to the gun to fight for independence, or submission to rule from Belgrade.

An ethnic Albanian boy makes a victory sign in front of the Albanian flag during a demonstration in the centre Pristina, the capital of Serbia's province of Kosovo (Reuters photo)

Asia-Pacific anti-crime meeting to make region safer for investors

MANILA (AFP) — Asia-Pacific interior ministers and senior officials will meet here next week to draw up measures to make the region, battered by a financial crisis, safe from cross-border crime, officials said Wednesday.

Officials said that as the region emerges from the crisis in the next few years, nations would still be under threat by organised crime rings which can only be dealt with through a united international action.

The three-day Regional Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime hopes to gether interior and home affairs ministers and senior internal security officials from 50 countries, Philippine Interior Secretary Epimaco Velasco said.

Among the countries invited to send delegates are China, North and South Korea, as well as several countries from the Middle East, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Russia and the United States have been invited as observers in the March 23-25 conference.

"Leaders of these countries are now taking serious cognizance of the threat posed by transnational crimes to the socio-political and economic stability of their respective nations," Mr. Velaeso said.

He said organised crime such as money laundering, drug trafficking, paedophilia, terrorism and firearms smuggling "recognise no boundaries, religion, ideologies and race."

Interior Undersecretary Manuel Sanchez said delegates hope to share experiences in fighting organised crime gangs and come up with measures to reduce the risks for investors and residents in the region.

"This will go a long way to attracting foreign investors to come not only to the Philippines but also to the region as a whole," Mr. Sanchez said in a news briefing.

He said that despite the turmoil, which has led to a general economic slowdown, "governments in Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific are now pooling together their efforts" to rebuild their economies and assure a safer business climate.

The delegates expect to come up with a Manila declaration on the prevention and control of organised crime and corruption which would contain a blueprint of how the region would fight these entrenched syndicates.

A diplomatic source said the inclusion of corruption in the discussions was pushed by major Western powers to eliminate the practice of paying bribes to Asian officials and governments to facilitate business transactions.

Senior Philippines diplomat Edwin Bael said the conference is part of a U.N. effort to "create global responses to the phenomenon of transnational crime."

He said that countries "have realised that plain unilateral or bilateral arrangements are no longer sufficient to respond to the operation of criminal elements operating on a transnational level."

The agenda includes discussions on conventions to prevent criminals from seeking refuge in foreign countries as well as technical cooperation between developing and industrialised countries.

Preventing crimes committed through the use of computers will also be discussed, officials said.

The Philippines is likely to push for more effective ways to combat trans-continental sex tours preying on Filipino children, officials said.

Two Britons and an Australian have been sentenced to up to 17 years in jail for paedophilia in the Philippines since 1996.

Results of the Manila conference will be used during a meeting in April in Vienna of the Commission on International Crime Prevention and in the U.N. General Assembly special session in June on drugs and related crimes, Mr. Bael said.

British thwart N. Irish bomb attack

BELFAST (R) — British forces said Wednesday they had foiled a suspected sectarian bomb attack during a party at a club close to a Roman Catholic Church in Northern Ireland.

Police evacuated the building and nearby homes late Tuesday while an army bomb disposal officer disarmed "an improvised explosive device" left at the front of the recreation club in the mainly Protestant town of Larne.

The club was holding a party at the time featuring a children's Irish dance troupe to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, Ireland's national day.

"There was slight damage to the front door but nobody was injured," a police source said.

Condemning the attack, club official Charlie Massey said the club tried to encourage good community relations and both Protestants and Catholics had been at the function.

"We try to take pleasure in being non-sectarian and open to all. We run bingo sessions for both sides of the community. We run pensioners' parties, all sides are invited... and this is how we are treated. It is despicable," he told BBC Radio.

Northern Ireland has suffered years of sectarian violence linked to decades of division between Protestants and Catholics about rule from London.

Majority Protestants support British but minority Catholics want union with neighbouring Ireland.

Court sentences deposed Cambodian premier to 30 years in absentia

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — A military court Wednesday sentenced ousted Cambodian co-Premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh to 30 years in jail after finding him guilty in absentia of plotting with the outlawed Khmer Rouge to overthrow the government.

The prince, who is in exile in Bangkok, described the court verdict as "disgusting." But diplomats expressed hope there would be a quick amnesty so Cambodia's election schedule was not undermined.

It was the second time in two weeks the 54-year-old prince has been sentenced by a Phnom Court in his absence. He now faces 35 years in prison as a March 4 trial ordered him jailed for five years for arms smuggling.

Three co-defendants charged with collusion, royalist military commanders Nhiek Bun Chhay, Serei Kosal and Chao Sambath, were sentenced to 20 years jail each.

Nhiek Bun Chhay, faces 24 years in prison as he was sentenced to four years on the earlier weapons charges. Serei Kosal, who was sentenced to 10 years for an antiquities theft last month, now faces 30 years in prison.

Chao Sambath was killed following the prince's violent ouster last July.

The four defendants were ordered to pay more than $54 million in compensation to the government and victims of the weekend of fighting in Phnom Penh last July that ousted the prince.

All their property was ordered confiscated to pay the compensation. Presiding Judge Ney Thol said if the money not paid, the convicted men would be subject to additional time in jail.

The defendants were also ordered to replace one Russian-made Mi-8 helicopter destroyed by the Khmer Rouge in February, 1997 when the prince sent officials to the rebel headquarters to open talks.

Prince Ranariddh and the surviving co-defendants have repeatedly protested their innocence, refused to recognise the legitimacy of the court and were not represented at the trial.

In Bangkok, Kong Vibol, a close aide of the prince, said: "The prince and his cabinet reject this verdict outright. The court is clearly not independent. This is disgusting."

The judge found the defendants guilty before a packed hearing at a defense ministry auditorium.

"Prince Ranariddh well planned to organise a coup to overthrow the Cambodian government and seize power through force and this act occurred (last) July 5 and 6," Ney Thol said.

Fifteen witnesses testified at the two-day trial, accusing the prince of negotiating with the Khmer Rouge, bringing illegal soldiers into the capital and arming them.

Prosecutor Sao Sok said the prince set the stage for his violent campaign in early 1996 when he told his royalist FUNCINPEC party to build up its armed forces to achieve military parity with the Cambodia People's Party of Second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

To achieve this, the prince needed the assistance of the hardline Khmer Rouge and opened negotiations with them in early 1997, Sao Sok said.

The two trials were one step in Japanese-sponsored peace plan aimed at allowing the prince to return to participate in elections in July.

Under the plan, the prince will be pardoned by his father, King Norodom Sihanouk, erasing his convictions and making him eligible for the polls.

The prince's aide said Princess Bopha Devi, Prince Ranariddh's older sister would write to the king "as soon as possible" requesting a pardon.

But the king has said the pardon must be approved by Hun Sen, who in turn has insisted Prince Ranariddh must first admit his guilt.

King Sihanouk, who is in Beijing, declined to comment on the 30-year jail term against his son.

A member of the monarch's entourage said "the king has no comment to make and refers you to his comments of last Saturday published in his monthly bulletin."

In his monthly review, King Sihanouk said he would only give a pardon to Prince Ranariddh if requested by his son and by Cambodia's two prime ministers Hun Sen and Ung Huot.

Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra said the Thai government was happy the trial was over quickly and Ranariddh could now prepare to take part in elections scheduled later this year.

"The trial finished in short time and that's good for the prince himself," Mr. Sukhumbhand told AFP.

"Prince Ranariddh will have enough time to get a royal pardon which will bring him a step closer to taking part in the election."

Indian move threatens nuke treaty — diplomats

VIENNA (AFP) — International nuclear watchdogs sought Wednesday to play down the significance of the announcement by India's new Hindu-led coalition that it is committed to producing nuclear weapons.

But diplomats familiar with the issue warned that the move threatens regional stability and raises question marks about the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

"The knock on effort for stability in the region could be major," said a diplomat who asked not to be named.

"The political significance of announcing that you're going to do it will make waves in Pakistan, and will be negatively perceived in the region and around the world," he said.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it was not officially concerned by the announcement.

"India is not a signatory to the CTBT, it has always kept the option open. There is no infringement of its international obligations" said IAEA spokesman David Kyd.

Meanwhile the Vienna-based Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CBTBO), set up to monitor the treaty, also played down the significance of the Indian decision.

"They are not saying anywhere they are going to test," said spokesman Carlos Hernandez. "They are saying that they are going to produce nuclear weapons. It's not our business until that happens."

India's new ruling coalition, led by the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), said Wednesday it would take "all necessary steps" to ensure the "security, territorial integrity and unity of India."

"Towards that end, we will reevaluate the nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons," it said.

Mr. Hernandez noted that India, with which the CTBTO had regular "informal conversations," was not a signatory to the treaty. "It's not our job to push countries to sign up," he said.

But he added: "We don't want to isolate India, we want to attract India. They have always been very positive in our informal conversations with them ... You have to be very careful and polite."

And he concluded: "Of course we want India to join the treaty."

The Vienna diplomat noted that India, along with Pakistan and Israel, is not a signatory to the CTBT.

With signing of CTBT "there has been hopes that the days of nuclear weapons are numbered," he said. But the Indian announcement "puts a question mark over that. This is a sign in the opposite direction.

"I believe they will find themselves under strong pressure to think again," he added.

French right, left rally against 'dining with the devil'

PARIS (AFP) — France's mainstream left and right closed ranks Wednesday against far right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose offer of local electoral alliances with his rightwing rivals has thrown chaos into the race for the country's regional assemblies.

Speaking on Europe-1 radio, the anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic Le Pen slammed the leadership of the mainstream rightwing parties as "decadent losers" for ordering local members to refuse to do deals with his front to win office in the country's 22 metropolitan regions.

Councillors who won seats to the regions in polls last Sunday are to choose presidents Friday, the final chapter of the vote.

The governing leftwing coalition and conservatives have outright majorities one region each, leaving the Front, with its record 15.27 per cent score, as potential kingmaker in the remaining 20 regions.

In tough statements this week both the neo-Gaullist RPR and centre-right UDF rejected Mr. Le Pen's offer of electoral support in exchange for regional platforms including some of the Front's pet themes — no rise in local tax, priority for law-and-order and the protection of "French cultural and regional identities."

But in the provinces, where local rightwingers stand to lose power and perks, reports trickled in of horsetrading with the Front in five or six regions.

"If some want to hold on to office for the official car, the insignia and the cash, let them speak out," said UDF leader Francois Leotard. "They will have become mere puppets of the National Front."

Said the daily Liberation in an editorial: "To keep their seats and satisfy their appetites ... they're off to dine with the devil."

And RPR leader Philippe Seguin, sticking to his firm line on the matter, Wednesday expelled a local member in the Oise region north of Paris from the party for concluding a deal with the Front this week.

The ruling Socialists meanwhile offered to withdraw from the race for the regional presidencies in six regions to block Le Pen's bid for alliances. "We call on the right to do the same," party leader Francois Hollande said.

Dissident rightwingers in the provinces argued that a pact with the Front was no worse than the decision by the Socialists and Greens to govern in coalition with the Communists.

"When the left unites in order to win the right must do likewise. The entire right, from the centre to the extremists," former cabinet minister Jean-Pierre Soisson said recently.

Lashing out against the rightwing leadership stand, Mr. Le Pen said "most (rightwinger) supporters favour accords with the National Front and cannot see why the Front should be cast aside when the left opens its arms to the Communists."

"We are in contact with realistic rightwingers who will join us," he said.

Ever since the Front surfaced on the national scene, the mainstream right has rejected alliances with Mr. Le Pen.

Public opinion polls show six out of 10 of their supporters opposed to deals with a party seen as epitomising intolerance and undemocratic ways. And rightwing analysts believe the longterm fallout and drop in support would far outweigh the lure of immediate local gains.

An alliance with the Front would be both a moral and political impasse, Mr. Seguin said Tuesday.

"We cannot endorse their outrageous outbursts and the terrible words that remind us of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia ... and we have nothing in common with their proposals."

Added senior UDF official Claude Goasguen: "All this is a National Front lure, an attempt to discredit us by forcing us into doing wrong.

"Le Pen is doing a belly-dance, but he's too old for it."

Thailand holiday cholera count adds another Hong Kong suspect

HONG KONG (AFP) — Hong Kong health authorities said Wednesday a man from a fourth tour group to Thailand was suspected of having contracted cholera while holidaying in Bangkok.

They said the 26-year-old man, who returned from a week-long tour on March 15, was listed with suspected cholera after 25 other tourists from three earlier groups had been confirmed as having been infected.

All four groups were organised by the same travel company and are believed to have eaten at the same venue in Bangkok's River market.

Until late Wednesday, the total number of confirmed cholera cases so far this year was 45, including 30 imported cases and 15 local cases, after a 26-year-old woman was added to the local list, with one suspected case.

Hong Kong has stood by its charge that Thailand was the source of cholera that struck down the holiday makers, but conceded Tuesday the strain was a mild one.

Thai health officials have denied there was any cholera in Thailand, saying the illness in Hong Kong was "severe diarrhoea."

An anti-cholera taskforce was set up Monday, which ordered tests on imported seafood before it is released to markets. It also ordered checks on seafood restaurants and a publicity drive to warn of the dangers of contaminated foodstuffs and poor hygiene.

All inbound passengers from Thailand have since Sunday been handed health alert cards and advised to seek medical assistance if they show symptoms of cholera, including vomiting or diarrhoea.

58 evacuated as plane's nosewheel collapses

MANCHESTER, England (AFP) — Fifty-eight passengers on board a British Airways flight were evacuated by emergency chute when the nosewheel of their aircraft collapsed shortly after landing at Manchester airport, northwest England, Wednesday.

One passenger was taken to hospital after being injured during the evacuation of the domestic flight from Southampton.

A full emergency was declared and the airport closed to all flights, said an airport spokesman. It was hoped to reopen the airport in the afternoon.

The spokesman said the wheel collapsed after touchdown as the twin-engined ATP aircraft, with a four-member crew, was rolling down the runway towards a turn-off point.

The aircraft came to a halt more than half way down the runway and was standing with its nose on the ground.

Indonesian students injured in clashes with security forces

JAKARTA (AFP) — Indonesian students Wednesday maintained their pressure to demand reforms despite clashes with security forces which left at least 28 people injured.

Demonstrations were held in Jakarta and Padang, West Sumatra, within hours of clashes in Solo and in Surabaya Tuesday.

Students of the 11 March University in Solo, Central Java, were violently forced back onto their campus after they attempted to take an anti-government protest onto the streets, the Kompas Daily said. Police fired tear gas.

Ari Kristiono of the emergency team at the university said 25 students were taken to hospital after the clash but only four were detained, Kompas reported.

Local police chief Colonel Riswahyono said police took action after students threw stones at security forces. In Surabaya, the capital of East Java, some 200 students rallied at the Teachers' University. At least three students were injured after they were beaten by baton wielding riot police, a witness said.

The Surabaya students, who had been protesting the new cabinet sworn in by President Suharto, had attempted to pass the campus gate, the witness said.

Wednesday, around 70 students at the private Jakarta University held a peaceful rally demanding lower prices and wideranging reforms, witnesses said.

University staff said there were a lot of plain clothes police among the onlookers, but no uniformed security forces.

In Padang, West Sumatra, some 200 students of the state Andalas University held a rally, residents said.

The students said the new cabinet should report the assets of their children as well as spouses and their own wealth. They also called for government reforms and immediate efforts to ease the country's economic crisis, especially to provide affordable food and medicine.

Mr. Suharto ordered the 36 new ministers he swore in Monday to report their wealth and that of their spouse, as part of a drive towards a clean government.

In Surabaya, police were seen on standby at the entrance gate of at least two state universities, the Airlangga University and the Teachers' University, residents said.

Thousands of students have conducted peaceful rallies in campuses in scores of towns, sometimes gathering up to 10,000 people, to demand comprehensive reforms to end the crisis.

Security officials have warned they will not tolerate street rallies but would allow demonstrations to proceed if held within the confines of their universities.

Indonesian authorities have said they will allow student rallies on campuses, but warned that street protests will not be tolerated.

Military chief General Wiranto called Tuesday for students to open dialogue with military representatives to air their grievances rather than stage demonstrations.

Presidential candidate Karen Demirchyan speaks during an interview March 17. Prime Minister and Acting President Robert Kocharyan will face Mr. Demirchyan, Armenia's Soviet-era leader in a March 30 second-round election (Reuters photo)

OSCE slams Armenia poll, demands anti-fraud moves

YEREVAN (AFP) — The chief OSCE election monitor slammed Armenia's "deeply flawed" presidential vote Wednesday, warning he would not validate the ballot unless urgent measures to prevent fraud were taken ahead of a March 30 run-off.

Sam Brown, head of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission which monitored Monday's vote, said the ballot was tainted in around 15 per cent of polling districts.

OSCE and Council of Europe election officials catalogued problems with the voting process; voting by the military; the use of state resources; the presence of police and other unauthorised personnel at polling stations; media bias; and campaign violence.

The irregularities "could have raised serious doubts about the outcome had the result been close," said Mr. Brown.

However, "although it (the election) was deeply flawed, we don't think that the outcome would have been changed by any of the violations that we observed."

But he went on to warn that the decisive round in two weeks time "has to be a lot better, or it won't get a clean bill of health."

With more than 60 per cent of votes counted, Prime Minister Robert Kocharian, who is also acting president, was leading rival Karen Demirchian by a margin of 38.8 per cent to 30.52 per cent.

Under Armenian election law, a candidate must garner more than 50 per cent of the vote to win the first round outright.

"The government of Armenia should take immediate steps to address the problems outlined in this statement prior to the second round," said Mr. Brown.

Although the OSCE official declined to apportion blame for the irregularities, Lord Russell Johnston, head of the Council of Europe monitors, said they were "mainly caused by over zealousness of mid-level electoral officials and did not represent a coordinated policy by the authorities."

International observers would study opposition claims of widescale violations of the electoral law once concrete evidence had been produced, he added.

The election, prompted by the abrupt resignation early February of incumbent Levon Ter-Petrossian, became mired in allegations of ballot-rigging as soon as the official campaign ended Sunday night.

One election official said she had caught someone trying to drop 21 voting slips into a ballot box, while another said youths stuffed some 600 voting slips for Mr. Kocharian into a ballot box.

Observers from the Council of Europe, which is currently considering Armenia's membership application, said some 174 unregistered Armenian soldiers had cast their ballots an a separate polling station. Other troops told AFP that they had been instructed to vote for Mr. Kocharian by their officers.

Tuesday seven candidates, including leading contenders Demirchian, Communist leader Sergei Badalian and opposition nationalist Vazgen Manukian, issued a signed statement complaining of gross voting irregularities.

However, only Badalian stated unequivocally that he considered the results of the first round invalid.

Armenian Central Election Committee chief Khachatur Bezirjian, however, dismissed the complaint, saying: "I view this statement as political and not legal."

The fraud charges bore a dark resemblance to allegations which marred Armenia's last presidential polls in 1996, which saw the official winner — Ter-Petrossian — send tanks into the streets of Yerevan to crush mass protests by supporters of his challenger Manukian.

Korean peace talks resume as North denies offer to South

GENEVA (AFP) — Four-party talks to bring permanent peace to the Korean Peninsula resumed here Wednesday, amid a sideline row between Pyongyang and Seoul over the possibility of direct negotiations.

The head delegates of the four parties to the Geneva talks — grouping the United States and China, as well as the two Koreas — began talks at 10:00 a.m. (0900 GMT), following reports of progress during Tuesday's session.

However, proceedings were partly overshadowed by confusion over an apparent North Korean offer — later denied — to resume an inter-Korean dialogue suspended since 1994.

South Korean Foreign Minister Park Chung-Soo told a cabinet meeting in Seoul Wednesday that the deputy head of the North Korean delegation in Geneva, Li Gun, had offered to resume direct negotiations.

"Li Gun, told (the South's) Yoo Myung-Hwa, director for the North American Affairs Bureau, that Pyongyang is willing to have inter-Korean dialogue in the near future," Mr. Park said.

However, Mr. Li swiftly denied making any such offer.

"It is nonsense," he said, accusing the South Koreans of "playing games."

Stressing that he had no authority to propose an inter-Korean dialogue, Mr. Li said his only brief in Geneva was to push ahead the four-party peace talks.

"Inter-Korean issues should not be brought up here," he said.

In Seoul, the South Korean foreign ministry officials admitted to some uncertainty over the nature of Mr. Li's alleged remarks.

"It was not a formal offer. We don't know what it was," said one official, who did not rule out the possibility that Li Gun had been floating a trial balloon.

Inter-Korean talks were cut off after the sudden death of the North's founder Kim Il-Sung in 1994 on the grounds that Seoul did not express condolences to Pyongyang.

Meanwhile, delegates in Geneva said some headway had been made in the four-party talks Tuesday.

Chinese head delegate Chen Jian told reporters that the discussions had "made some progress" — an assessment echoed by a South Korean official, who nevertheless qualified the progress as "modest."

"The fact that we are still talking is also progress," he added.

This is the second round of the four-party peace talks following a landmark meeting here last December aimed at thrashing out a permanent peace treaty to replace the current armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean war.

The talks are significant because they are the first under newly installed South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung, who has called for an exchange of special envoys and a possible summit with North Korea.

North Korea has yet to reply, and the South had hoped for some informal contacts to bring up the issue at these talks.

China's Chen Jian said Tuesday that after two days of talks "all the parties have had an occasion to state their views and positions."

"The marvel is that it was done in a frank and calm atmosphere," he said.

"We know where the limits are and how we can manoeuvre within these limits," he said, adding that now the four parties had to "find a compromise within these limits."

Yeltsin continues treatment outside Moscow

MOSCOW (R) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin remained out of public view for the sixth day Wednesday after retreating to a residence outside Moscow with a respiratory infection.

The Kremlin said Mr. Yeltsin, 67, was coughing less Wednesday and regaining his voice, but he has not attended any official functions since last Thursday and has cancelled all engagements for the rest of this week.

"Russian President B.N. Yeltsin's condition is stable today. He is coughing less, he is regaining his voice and his temperature is in the normal range," the presidential press service said in a statement.

It said the results of blood analyses were positive, which meant inflammation of his throat and respiratory tracts was being stopped.

The press service said Mr. Yeltsin had met Valentin Yumashev, his chief of staff, and had been given permission by doctors to work in his study at the Gorky-9 residence outside Moscow from now on.

It did not say when the president would return to his Kremlin office.

Doctors said Tuesday Mr. Yeltsin risked developing more serious health problems if he rushed his return to work. But friends and aides who have seen him say he is "raring to go."

Some Russian media and political analysts have said his illness is politically convenient and allowed him to postpone a meeting planned for Thursday with the heads of 11 ex-Soviet republics grouped with Russia in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

They suggested the prospect of the tricky summit may have helped make Mr. Yeltsin feel out of sorts.

Wednesday's Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper quoted Kremlin sources as saying Mr. Yeltsin was not actually that ill, despite official reports his doctors had put him on antibiotics and advised him to rest.

"Could Yeltsin's illness be diplomatic?" the newspaper asked in a banner headline.

"Something magical is going on nowadays with the president's health," the popular daily Moskovsky Komsomolets said on the front page of its Wednesday edition. It compared Mr. Yeltsin's illness with the unseasonable cold snaps Moscow has been suffering.

"It is as fickle as the spring weather: It froze over, then there was a thaw and then — boom — black ice on the roads," the daily added, making clear it thought the summit had something to do with Mr. Yeltsin's changeable condition.

At the previous CIS summit in the Moldovan capital Chisinau last October, Mr. Yeltsin came under fire from other leaders for the failure of the Moscow-led organisation to break down barriers which appeared with the reintroduction of capitalism.

Mr. Yeltsin, keen to appeal to popular nostalgia for the Soviet Union where it suits him, has said he is anxious to revive the looser grouping and set great store by the Moscow summit.

Trial of 51 on Rwandan genocide charges opens

BYUMBA, Rwanda (AFP) — Fifty-one people accused of genocide and related crimes in Rwanda in 1994 went on trial Wednesday, defended by both Rwandan and foreign lawyers, in this central northern town.

The defendants comprised the largest number to go on trial simultaneously since Rwanda began trying suspects from the mass slaughter of minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus, in which between 500,000 and 800,000 people died.

The accused are jointly accused of criminal association, looting and genocide from April 7, 1994, the day the massacres began after an attack in which Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed when his plane was shot down.

They are accused of being responsible for the death of at least 60 people on Muhura hill in the Byumba district.

Fourteen lawyers have been appointed to represent the defendants, as well as 15 civil parties to the trial. The defence team includes seven Rwandans and seven members of the international association Avocats Sans Frontières (Lawyers without Borders).

"It's very courageous of Rwandan lawyers to defend the genocide suspects, in the current context, because Rwandans find it hard to understand or accept the right to a defence," the ASF mission head in Rwanda, Marielle Hallez, told AFP.

The genocide largely ended when then rebels of the mainly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) seized power in July 1994, but the country was deeply traumatised by the wholescale slaughter and still faces conflict between extremist Hutu insurgents and the Tutsi-dominated army.

Last year, Rwandan courts heard 304 cases, in which 108 defendants were sentenced to death and 103 jailed for life.

Only 17 were acquitted. ASF assisted 44 per cent of the defendants and 27 per cent of civil parties to the trials.

More than 130,000 suspects in the 1994 massacres are currently in Rwanda's overcrowded prisons awaiting trial in the country's courts.

These are separate from the U.N. international criminal tribunal for Rwanda based in Arusha, Tanzania, which was set up by the U.N. Security Council in November 1994 to track down and try prime genocide suspects, but has not yet handed down any verdicts.

U.S. scientists claim proof birds descended from dinosaurs

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. palaeontologists have discovered a fossil in Madagascar proving that the first birds descended directly from clawed, meat-eating dinosaurs, the weekly Science says in its forthcoming issue.

Research team leader Catherine Forster, of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, said the 65-to-70 million-year-old fossil has long, feather-bearing bones extending from the forelimbs, a clear indication the animal was able to fly.

But, unlike most birds, "Rahona," as the find has been named in Madagascan — meaning "menace from the clouds" — has a long, bony tail and a sickle-shaped claw at the end of its second toe.

The researchers said this rare claw is identical to one featured by a family of predator dinosaurs known as therapods, which many experts believe directly preceded the first bird, or archaeopteryx.

"This discovery lends a lot of weight to the idea that birds are a side branch of the theropod family tree," said Ms. Forster.

"This new fossil is one of the strongest last nails in the coffin of those who doubt that dinosaurs had anything to do with the origin of birds," she added.

Palaeontologists have long been divided on the idea that birds descended from dinosaurs.

The discovery in Germany last century of two 150-million-year-old fossilised archaeopteryx, believed to be the first winged reptile, gave rise to the theory linking the genealogy of birds and dinosaurs. Over the years, however, scientists noted several significant skeletal differences between the two creatures, throwing the theory into serious doubt.

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Editorial and advertising offices:
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
Telephones: **5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585**
Facsimile: **5696183**
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Vigilance necessary in relations

JORDAN STANDS on firm ground in formally protesting to Israel over remarks made by the minister of infrastructure, Ariel Sharon, in which he reasserted that his country will still target Khaled Misha'al. The statement was strong coming from Sharon, who was credited with easing the tension between Jordan and Israel over the assassination attempt on Misha'al's life last September by assuring the Kingdom then that the "mistake" would never be repeated. Jordan took Sharon's words at face value and following the removal of the Mossad chief, Danny Yatom, who was responsible for the attempt, started to mend ties with Israel on the ironclad assurances that the Israelis would not tamper with Jordanian security. Sharon recently made an official visit to the country, during which he was received by His Majesty King Hussein and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan on the assumption that the Misha'al incident was in the past.

Jordan of course rejects any assault on the life of any citizen, whether it is carried out inside or outside the Kingdom, and considers Sharon's declaration of intent to assassinate Misha'al a threat to its security and a violation of international law. This was the gist of the message that acting Foreign Minister Talal Al Hassan told Israeli Ambassador Oded Eran on Sunday. Jordan had a right to ask how trustworthy Israel is and how committed it is to its assurances. Judging by Israel's turnaround on the Misha'al case, we have to conclude that we have to always be on guard. That calls for a high level of alert in our relations with Israel.

Perhaps we need to heed the call of the many people who have strong reservations about normalising relations with Israel and who call for a cooling period instead of warming up relations, especially with the current government in Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu is heavily dependent on Sharon and his counsel, and we therefore presume that the latter's policy and statements reflect faithfully the inner thoughts of the prime minister. We must maintain our vigilance at all times and remember the words of Labour leader Ehud Barak in the wake of Netanyahu's election that the man can never be trusted.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's editorial Wednesday addressed the prospects of a European initiative to end the deadlock in the Middle East peace process saying that the Europeans seem decided to shift their role from financing the process to taking an active part in its implementation. The editorial said the tour of British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook seems to point that way especially as Cook has defied the Israelis and disregarded their views when they opposed his visit to Jabal Abu Ghneim, the area where a Jewish settlement is to be erected. According to the paper the Arabs of course welcomed Cook's tour and the European Union's bid, they stand firm in their demand that U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 be implemented and they support the exchange of land for peace. But the paper said that unless the European moves are backed by practical steps to force the Israelis to retreat from their intransigent stand, nothing would be achieved and Europe's credibility would be the victim.

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said thousands of employees have the right to raise the hue and cry against moves by the government to lay its hands on their savings funds because it would be an infringement on their personal rights. These employees have the right to depend on their savings which have accumulated over the years and they refuse to see these savings reduced through the imposition of income tax on them, he added. However, he said what is not right is to hear voices rising in various corners accusing the government that it is laying its hands on the savings in response to a demand by the International Monetary Fund which has nothing to do with this issue. The writer said if the government plans to introduce a law aimed at protecting the employees' interests it should first take the views of those directly affected through their representatives in parliament and should propose a draft law that would be very reasonable and acceptable to the beneficiaries.

View from Academia

Dr. Ahmad Majdoubeh

Visits to the region reveal Israel's intransigence, isolation

THE INTENSIFIED political efforts exerted last week and this week (mainly in the form of high-level visits and consultations among Mideast peace partners and patrons) may turn out to be, if not immediately at least eventually, exactly what is needed at this point in time.

As things stand, the peace process (as we all know) is at a complete standstill. Precious time passes by, leaving us less than half-way through with peacemaking and at almost square one with peace-building. Violence erupts daily, as a direct result of the Israeli government's short-sighted practices and the continued occupation of Arab territories, causing tragedies to everyone, though more so to the Arab than the Israeli side.

The recent as well as current visits and consultations — the Crown Prince's to Palestine and Israel last week, and this week the British Foreign Secretary's and the U.N. secretary general's to several Middle-Eastern countries, and His Majesty's to Washington — may not yield dramatic, spectacular, tangible, concrete and precise results in the short-run. Aside from the Crown Prince who had gone to Tel Aviv with the specific aim of ratifying agreements, the other leaders have no specific plans or proposals as such.

Furthermore, how could such visits and consultations bear results when the Israeli government continues to be reckless (its soldiers shoot unarmed Palestinians at checkpoints, funerals and demonstrations without even giving the matter a second thought), rude (denying a guest — British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook — the hospitality he deserves as a visiting dignitary, for saying or doing what the Israeli government does not happen to like, even though he is speaking the truth and nothing but the truth), and shameless (declaring, through its minister of infrastructure, that it still intends and plans to assassinate Hamas's Khaled Misha'al, despite the stir the botched Mossad assassination attempt created, the embarrassment it caused Jordan, and the ironic fact that it comes from a man (Sharon) who himself has been directly involved in terrorism and bloodshed).

But even though the said visits may not have any dramatic short-term goals, and even though the present Israeli government is not responding positively, they are of great importance.

Two points I wish to highlight by way of illustrating the importance of such visits:

We, in the region, know very well what the present Israeli government is — judging from what it does, and not what it says. It is a government which is extremely difficult to deal with: hardline, uncompromising, intransigent, elusive, and selfish. It is, so far, a government which has done more harm than good to the peace process. What is indeed puzzling (perhaps even funny) is that while Israel continues to subvert, frustrate, and stall peace efforts, its prime minister continues to declare that his is the only Israeli government capable of making peace with the Palestinians and other Arab neighbours. How is this possible, may one ask, when the Israeli government's attitudes and actions point to the exact opposite of what its prime minister keeps declaring?

We have, since the inauspicious advent of the present Israeli government, become fully aware of its stalling and procrastination tactics. We know enough not to be deceived by its sweet tongue and honeyed rhetoric: actions speak louder than words. And we believe that the U.S. administration, even though it may not admit so in public, knows deep-down aptly well the present Israeli government's subversiveness and elusiveness. But, I want others to know: the Europeans, the Africans, the Far-East Asians, the Australians, the South-Americans.

The unpleasant, inhospitable treatment of Foreign Minister Cook ought to give Britain and the Europeans a taste (though a bitter one) of what the present Israeli government is. Not long ago, Britain played an important role in the creation of Israel. Israel's ungratefulness is quite ironic, and may be the time has come for Britain and Europe as a whole to make it up to the Palestinians and Arabs. Having said this, however, we applaud Secretary Cook's insistence to visit Jabal Abu Ghneim as well as his firm condemnation of the Israeli settlements.

2. The visits make it clear that the Israeli government — as a natural outcome of its attitude, practices and behaviour — stands alone today, isolated and outcast.

What it says, nobody is echoing. What it does, nobody approves of. Every leader, from the region or outside it, who meets the Israeli premier at a press conference or face to face in direct talks lectures him (the Israeli prime minister) on what the right attitude is and what ought to be done. Constantly, the Israeli government is being told not only by Arabs but also by the Americans, the Europeans, and other international personalities that it is an occupier, that it is a law breaker (i.e. settlements), a breaker of agreements, a troublesome neighbour, and an obstructor of peace.

The Arab side should invite more world leaders to the region to give them a first-hand experience of Israel's intransigence and to continue to reveal to the international community that Israel — due to its rejectionist, subversive and reckless policies — stands alone.

India's new government has people worried

By Gwynne Dyer

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, who will be sworn in today as India's prime minister, likes to be called a 'nationalist,' and a moderate one at that. But practically every other Indian political party has referred to his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as 'fascists' in the past, and Vajpayee's own keenest supporters reject the slander that he is a 'moderate.' "The BJP is a creation of the RSS cadre," said Madan Das, joint secretary of the paramilitary National Volunteers Force (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh - RSS), as the BJP took the lead in last month's election. "Mr. Vajpayee cannot be a moderate. He was born, brought up and grown up in the RSS. He just presents our thoughts differently."

That is precisely what worries people: that the respectable, poetry-writing, 71-year-old Vajpayee may be just the acceptable facade of an aggressively nationalist, deeply intolerant and ruthlessly authoritarian gang of fascists who are now taking over the world's second-largest country. Nobody knows for sure, of course — but then back in 1933 nobody was quite sure what Mr. Hitler and the Nazi Party portended for Germany either.

To be fair, 'One nation, one people, and one culture', the BJP's election slogan, is not exactly the same as the Nazi 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuehrer'. But it isn't entirely different, either: after all, insisting upon 'one culture' in a country with 18 official languages and six major religions is a pretty transparent euphemism for suppressing the minorities. "The BJP is not a classic right-wing group," explains Rangesh Rangarajan, a political scientist in New Delhi. "Its priority is culture, not economics." Or as one enthusiastic BJP voter put it: "It's time the real Indians were given an advantage over the foreigners here."

'Real Indians,' in this typical BJP usage, means people who follow the Hindu religion — so all non-Hindu citizens of India, including the Sikhs, the ancient Parsee, Christian and Buddhist communities, and above all the 120 million Indian Muslims, become 'foreigners'.

This is an historical travesty. Almost all Indian Muslims, for example, are descended from local people who converted to Islam, for spiritual or practical reasons, after various Muslim invaders conquered large parts of the sub-continent. But it is a lie that appeals to many Hindu nationalists (especially in the Hindi-speaking north) who share the view that India is a 'wounded civilisation' that must somehow reclaim its soul.

The Nazis talked the same kind of trash, and attracted the same core clientele: lower middle class city-dwellers and the rural upper caste. The BJP also mimics the fascist line on the economy and foreign affairs: it touts a protectionist economic nationalism, and promises to develop and test India's nuclear weapons.

Other items in the BJP's traditional platform have now been suppressed in pursuit of broader electoral support, but they still worry those with long memories. They included revoking the special constitutional status of Kashmir (India's only Muslim-majority state), abolishing separate personal laws for Indian Muslims (dealing with marriage, inheritance, and so on), and building a Hindu temple on the site of the ancient Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya destroyed by Hindu zealots in 1992.

So why, given all this, are hordes of would-be political refugees not besieging the doors of foreign embassies in New Delhi? Why are China and Pakistan, the prospective targets of Indian nuclear weapons, not gibbering with fright? Why, indeed, is the entire world not transfixed by the prospect of one billion people, in a country with the scientific and industrial capabilities to do almost anything it wants, falling under fascist rule?

The entire world may simply be wrong. Most people were not that worried by the Nazis' rise to power in Germany either, because in 1933 it was hard to believe how far they would go. But another reason for not panicking about India is the thought that the BJP is probably not capable of doing what it would doubtless secretly like to do, because it won't be able to hang on to power long enough.

Since the long-ruling Congress Party went into decline in the late 1980s, Indian politics has spawned dozens of narrowly regional and ethnically-based parties, with the result, as columnist Inder Malhotra observed in 'The Hindu' newspaper last Sunday, that "horse-trading is a hopelessly inadequate description of what goes on in Indian politics." The coalition cobbled together to boost the BJP into power is a prime example of that process.

The BJP is the largest single party in the Lok Sabha, but to win a parliamentary majority it has had to make alliances with regional parties that have nothing in common with its ideology — and to drop large chunks of that ideology from its programme.

The coalition now entering office under Vajpayee includes parties like the Sikh separatist Akali Dal, and the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK), the personal vehicle of former movie star Jayalitha Jayaram, who turned to politics after making 115 Tamil-language films — and joined the present coalition in order to get corruption charges against her dropped.

"Politics is the art of the possible, and that's what this is all about," said Subramaniam Swamy, formerly Jayalalitha's deadly rival and now her candidate for finance minister. And if that's really all it's about, then there's no cause for worry. Optimists argue that the BJP may not last in office much longer than the mere 13 days Vajpayee had as prime minister after the last election. Its allies are utterly unreliable, other parties refuse to have anything to do with it, and a reinvigorated Congress under a popular new leader, Sonya Gandhi, just waits for it to stumble. So maybe it will be all right. And maybe it won't.

The long shadow of Hassan

Following is an editorial which appeared in *The Independent* on March 13, 1998.

THERE IS A country bordering on the European Union (EU) which was founded as a modern, secular, democratic and above all European state. It saw its destiny so much as part of our continent that it abandoned its ancient script and now uses our Roman alphabet. And yet Turkey will not be let into the club. Enlargement of the EU is one of the priorities of Britain's presidency, but Turkey is neither among the five next joiners, nor among the five next-but-ones, all of whose representatives assembled for talks in London on March 12, 1998.

So why is Turkey different from Estonia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania? The first, and very important, answer is human rights. Despite its aspirations, and despite the very recent democratic credentials of the convoy of countries which has jumped the queue ahead of it, Turkey's political system still fails to qualify. Istanbul's politicians are not fully insulated from the military and there have been abuses of human rights, especially those of ethnic minorities such as the Kurds.

But this is not the whole story, and it is worth pursuing further the reluctance to admit Turkey even into the EU's waiting room. For many, "not yet" is code for "never," and the issue of human rights usefully postpones facing up to other reasons. Even if Turkey's democracy were above reproach, it would be argued that Turkey is "not in Europe" or that it does not share our "common culture." But ever since the goddess Europa fled from Phoenicia to Greece, the boundaries of Europe have been fluctuating and ambiguous and its cultural identity likewise.

For many, 'not yet' is code for 'never,' and the issue of human rights usefully postpones facing up to other reasons.

What, then, is the real difference? It is that Turkey is a Muslim country. Ever since the giant Hassan stormed the wall of Constantinople at the head of a wave of Janissaries in 1453, ending a thousand years of the Christian Roman Empire of Byzantium, his shadow has fallen across the continent. Up to the walls of Vienna and back, modern Europe's identity was forged in opposition to Turkish Islam. The spectre of the heathen at the gate even featured in British domestic politics as recently as Gladstone's *Midlothian campaign*, fought on the demand that the Ottomans be ejected from Europe "bag and baggage."

So is the enlarged EU simply a neo-Christendom, an ethnic and cultural entity based on Christianity and Caucasian genes? (Never mind that the Caucasus mountains which gave their name to a racial type are to the north and east of Turkey). It cannot be, and it is as well to spell out why not. John Laughland's book The Tainted Source last year argued that the ideology underlying the EU is corrupted by German supremacism in a pan-European guise. He claimed that Paul-Henri Spaak, a Belgian founding father of the European Community, was a collaborationist and former intellectual admirer of Hitler, and that Jacques Delors was a disciple of a crypto-Nazi in the 1930s.

This is nonsense, given the EU's high and democratic principles. But it should force us to ask: Is there such a thing as a European identity, and does the EU exist to give expression to it? Because there is a radical open-endedness about the Union which is unsettling. There is the internal open-endedness of the integration process, enshrined in the phrase "ever-closer union" in the Treaty of Rome. It was precisely to counter this endless ambition that moderate Euro-sceptics, including our present foreign secretary, have championed the cause of an ever-wider union. This is the external open-endedness which saw the future eastern boundary of the EU pushed to the Black Sea and the steppes. But, as a permanent condition of the EU, this process of expansion is just as disorienting as a process of permanent unification. Why stop at the Urals or the Bosphorus?

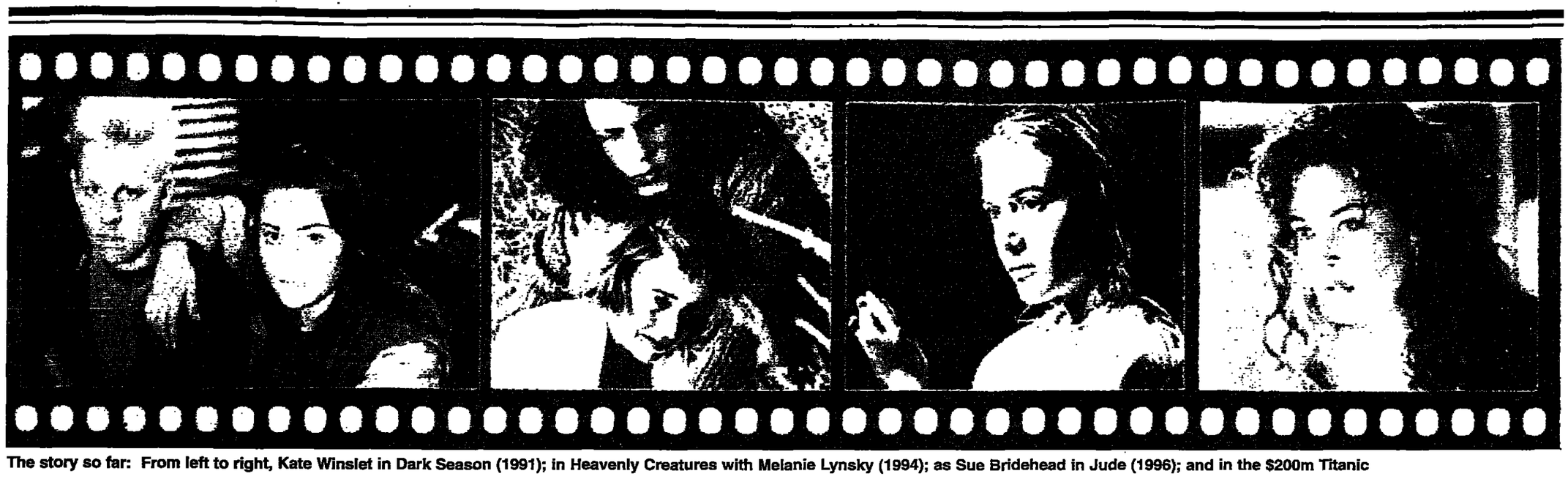
Even if Turkey's democracy were above reproach, it would be argued that Turkey is 'not in Europe' or that it does not share our 'common culture.'

Well, it has to stop somewhere, or the EU would simply be a free-trade and single-currency zone for advanced, liberal and democratic countries, regardless of cultural identity or geographical location. But Europe, as the region bordering on the Mediterranean, has a much longer history than the land-mass of north and west Europe. It is a history divided by religion, but it is a division (like the division of Europe by communism) which the EU could overcome.

That is why we should wrestle with the shadow of Hassan. Bosnian Muslims certainly feel strongly that Europe's Christian heritage ensured that they were left to their fate, and there is much truth in that. Bosnia could have been a model for a secular, tolerant and liberal state in which Christians and Muslims lived together. If Turkey could follow that model, then it should certainly be a candidate for EU membership.

Trying to tie part of the Islamic World to Western liberal democracy is not a strategy that has worked with Egypt, the greatest recipient of American aid after Israel. But the chances of success are much greater with Turkey, and the prize is great. Perhaps it will have to wait until Islamic agnosticism emerges as a dominant religion of Turkey, as Christian doubt has elsewhere, but it is important to offer the Turks a genuine chance to prove their liberal democratic credentials.

— The Independent



The story so far: From left to right, Kate Winslet in Dark Season (1991); in Heavenly Creatures with Melanie Lynsky (1994); as Sue Bridehead in Jude (1996); and in the $200m Titanic

What Kate did first

She's a hotter property than the new James Bond. But where did she come from? GARTH PEARCE of The Sunday Times finds out.

KATE WINSLET says she feels a very old 22. It is just as well. She is currently being engulfed by a tidal wave of publicity and recognition for her role in the new epic film Titanic and will be forced to call on every reserve to prevent her from going under. Every day brings a new front-page photo of her, with news of her illnesses (amoebic dysentery from location shooting in Marrakesh for her latest film, Hideous Kinky), her heartache (death of a former boyfriend), her almost literal going under in the icy tanks on the Titanic set. And as the self-congratulatory award season gets under way, she could become the bookmakers' favourite for the financial gold that an Oscar will bring in March. What then?

She is an energetic, open young woman, full of blunt observations about herself. But she has become wary in these paparazzi-driven times. Only last year, she was caught on camera kissing the actor Rufus Sewell in a shop doorway, of all places, and was horrified to see herself in a tabloid. There is also a fear for the privacy of her family, still living in the pre-war three-bedroom semi where she was brought up, which backs onto myriad terraced houses near the town's football ground in Reading, Berkshire. Even warnings from her actor father, Roger, to "watch your back" in the shallow grave of sincerity in Los Angeles, have been heeded.

But, otherwise, she says defiantly: "I have had to grow up quickly and haven't found that to be a chore. It is not as if I have had to think, 'What a shame that I've had to say goodbye to my youth.' I am actually looking forward to the prospect of getting older. I also know what life can bring and how cruel it can be. I've gone from being a girl to a woman remarkably fast and I feel ready, at the moment, for what might happen."

So how did Winslet do it? How is she starring in the most expensive film of all time — and, judging by early indications, possibly the highest-grossing ever — to earn fame and accolades in a handful of years?

Is it in her genes? Her grandparents, Oliver and Linda Bridges, ran Reading's repertory company from their back garden; her mother, Sally, had an actor brother, Robert; her father is an actor, too. But they have all struggled to get any sort of recognition.

"We never had a wealthy lifestyle, and I am grateful for that," she says. "It makes me appreciate everything that much more." When she was rejected by her chosen comprehensive because she lived out of the catchment area, her grandmother paid for her to attend a stage school called Redroofs in Maidenhead. "After the first two years, I knew I'd be on my own," she says. "I got a Sugar Puffs advertisement for £60 at the age of 13 and began earning regularly, with ads and voice-over work — some paid 150 quid for the day — to see myself through.

"I knew, right from the start, that it was not a matter of putting on red lipstick and tying your hair in bunches and saying, 'I want to be a star.' As much as I love acting, I always realised it was bloody hard work."

She also witnessed her father's experiences. "A brilliant actor and a wonderful man," she observes. "He just did not get the right opportunities." When she was 11, he suffered a serious accident. While helping a friend with a canal boat, he caught his foot in a coil of rope as it jammed against a bollard. The incident practically pulled off his foot. "As luck would have it, there was a helicopter rescue service only three miles away, which was able to take him to a microsurgery hospital," she recalls. "They took muscle from his arm and operated for 13 hours, saving his foot. But one leg is still 2in short."

It is a perfect example, she says, of the uncertainty of life in general and acting in particular. "There was family allowance, and mum had been working in a deli," she says, by way of explanation of how they coped financially. "It is a small rented house and the outgoings are not extreme — apart from the phone bill, with three girls." Her older sister, Anna, 25, is also an actress, but so far has followed the family pattern of irregular work; her sister Beth, 19, is acting, too. Their brother, Joss, aged 17, has yet to make up his mind if he wants to take the risk.

At 16, Winslet left Redroofs, worked on a BBC children's television drama called Dark Season, and started a romance with her late boyfriend, the scriptwriter Stephen Tredre, who was then 28. "He gave me love and confidence and it did not seem much of an age gap at the time," she says simply. "Even when the relationship came to an end two years ago, we remained friends." She also had to tackle a weight problem. At 15 and 5ft 6in tall, she was 13st. Through Weight Watchers and her own discipline, she shed 31/2st in 18 months. "I now accept that I am a womanly shape and do not have the figure of most Hollywood actresses," she shrugs. "I am not a twig and refuse to be one."

One of the ironies of Kate's minimal formal education is that she knew little of Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy or, indeed, history. "I did Romeo and Juliet for English GCSE and that was about it," she recalls. Instead, her career gathered pace — fast. She played a patient in the television series Shrinks, and another patient in the long-running Casualty, which, along with The Bill, is the only television she still watches. Then came her debut film, Heavenly Creatures, based on a true story of the 1950s, playing one of two teenage murderers in New Zealand; it alerted directors to her potential. Sense and Sensibility earned her an Oscar nomination three months after her 20th birthday. "I don't feel I missed out on my teens any more than I've missed out on going to night-clubs, taking drugs or getting drunk," she says. "As for men, one-night stands are not for me."

She has travelled further at a younger age than any other English actress of recent years. You should have to go back to the 25-year-old Julie Christie, who won an Oscar for Darling in 1965, to find such rapid success. Winslet now lives in a "seriously luxurious" north London flat, with fireplaces and balconies, has earned more than $1 million for Titanic and, awards or no awards, can command the equivalent of lottery millions for practically any Hollywood movie she cares to choose. She could outearn Pierce Brosnan.

What if she wins an Oscar? How will she deal with the motley crew of American film agents, personal publicists and hangers-on, who are veneer all through? "I am still Kate from Reading, for God's sake," she says. "It is ludicrous. I'm still wondering how the hell it all happened."

chip talk

What a charming display

By Jean-Claude Elias

BESIDES INTERNET, the computer item that has people talking is the PC monitor, or display. Software is becoming more sophisticated, but it still serves more or less the same purpose. The shape of keyboards and mice is relatively stable these days. Hard disk drives and processors are getting faster every month or so but they still look the same (we hardly see them anyway, entrapped as they are in the computer case).

The product that is now going through radical transformation is the monitor. Size first. From 14", the standard size of computer screens, is slowly becoming 15". Analysts estimate that within as little as two years, the 17" model — still a bit expensive now — will represent more than half of the installed units.

But size is not the most important aspect of the transformation. Flat panel displays (FPD) are now on the international market, albeit not yet on the Jordanian one. Whereas your regular CRT (cathode ray tube) monitor is about 35 to 40 cm deep, the depth of FPDs is 5 to 10 cm only.

In addition to saving precious space, the new type also saves power by running on one-third of the energy required to operate a CRT unit. Because of its high cost however, the FPD display hasn't yet really taken off. Indeed, the price tag of the average FPD model is in the range of JD1,000 to JD1,500, against JD200 to JD400 for a CRT equivalent. As with any PC item, the price is expected to fall within consumer's reach once it is really adopted by a large number of users.

But before the FPD becomes accessible to the mere mortal, another just-announced technological breakthrough may kill it. The Japanese giant Seiko-Epson, in cooperation with Cambridge Display Technology, has unveiled a prototype of an even flatter screen, based on a principle that is radically different from the CRT's or the FPD's. Using light emitting polymers (plastics) the display is sharper, brighter than the other types, consumes even less energy, and is just a few millimetres (yes, millimetres) thick. And it is expected to be cheaper too. Because the polymers are extremely flexible, such screens can be folded away after use, just like a projection screen for colour slides.

And just like CRTs and FPDs, the use of screens based on light emitting polymers won't be restricted to computers and will extend to television sets. But whereas FDPs are already available, it may be a few years before there's even a price tag on the new screen by Seiko-Epson. We'll keep dreaming in the meantime.

Turkey heads for new crisis as PM-army row grows

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey is heading for a fresh political crisis as conservative Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz escalates tensions with the powerful pro-secular army over a plan for crackdown on Islamists, analysts said Wednesday.

"The battle against religious extremism is up to my government and not to the military, whose main responsibility is to protect Turkey from foreign threats," Mr. Yilmaz said during a closed meeting with leaders of his conservative Motherland Party on Tuesday, a party source told AFP.

"Let the army mind its own business and let it leave us alone in dealing with our responsibilities," Mr. Yilmaz said, according to the source.

The army, which played a vital role in forcing an Islamist-led government to resign last year, is not happy with the performance of Mr. Yilmaz's government in fighting Islamism, military officials have said in private talks.

The Yilmaz-army conflict, the first since the premier took office last June, has escalated since last week and prompted press allegations that the military could stage a coup to topple him.

Although the military at the weekend denied any coup plans, Mr. Yilmaz continued to heighten his rhetoric against the army, making harsh remarks Tuesday.

"Yilmaz has three things in mind that make him think that he has a strong position," Ankara-based political analyst Dogan Akin told AFP.

"First of all, Yilmaz believes that his coalition government is indispensable as Turkey's fragmented parliament cannot produce an alternative cabinet in which the Islamists would not be present," Mr. Akin said.

The pro-Islamic Virtue Party, a continuation of the banned Welfare Party, is the largest in parliament. And the army, which removed the Islamist from power last year, would not allow it to take part in a new government.

"A military takeover that would dissolve parliament would lead to very heavy results for Turkey and Yilmaz believes the army cannot dare to do that," Mr. Akin added.

"Secondly, Yilmaz wants to give a message to the West that although the army brought him to power last year, he is not the man of the military and that he defends democracy," Mr. Akin said.

"And thirdly, Yilmaz wants to win the sympathy of religious voters, many of whom have been upset by Welfare's dissolution" by the Constitutional Court last year on charges that it had undermined Turkey's secular regime.

"But, the powerful army would not simply stay silent as Yilmaz challenges it. In any case, the crisis is likely to worsen," Mr. Akin said.

The Turkish army has staged three coups in the last 38 years, in 1960, 1971 and 1980, saying that its intention was to protect the state from destructive movements.

The army has criticised Mr. Yilmaz for lifting a ban on Islamic headscarves in religious schools and has warned the government against making concessions to the Islamists.

The army generals, who see themselves as guardians of Turkey's secular state, launched their anti-Islamist campaign last year during the rule of Islamist ex-Premier Necmettin Erbakan, accusing him of encouraging religious radicals.

In February last year, the military-dominated National Security Council (MGK), Turkey's top advisory body, urged Mr. Erbakan to implement an 18-point crackdown on Islamism, including the closure of some religious schools, a ban on Islamist propaganda and Islamic clothing and the sacking of religious extremists from state services.

Doubts voiced in Gulf over OPEC's future role

DUBAI (R) — The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), struggling to launch a counter attack against slumping oil prices, came under heavy scrutiny last week from former senior Gulf officials and newspapers.

With oil prices trapped at their lowest level for nine years, OPEC's ability to turn the market round when riddled with production *quota violations* was seriously questioned.

Hisham Nazer, Saudi Arabia's oil minister between 1987 and 1995, was quoted as saying that the 11-member group needed to change *course after failing over the* years to reach its price targets and losing market share to other producers.

"OPEC has not lost its usefulness but it needs to review its current goals," *the London-based Asharq* Al Awsat reported Sheikh Nazer as telling the Arabic daily in an interview.

"It cannot affect the market without incurring losses at a time when its members have conflicting political and oil interests," Sheikh Nazer, once a powerful figure in OPEC politics, was quoted as saying.

Sheikh Nazer's comments came a day after Saudi Arabia's former Finance Minister Mohammad Ali Abal Khail was reported as saying that OPEC needed to change its format to boost its flagging role in world oil *markets.*

Oil prices have fallen more than 40 per cent from last year's average of $19.30, punctured by OPEC's move last December to raise its production *ceiling by 10 per cent to* 27.5 million barrels per day (bpd).

But quota violations — led by Venezuela, Nigeria and Qatar — have pushed actual flows near 29 million bpd, *its highest level since* 1979.

Markets have been unnerved by growing signs of a face off between Saudi Arabia, the world's leading oil exporter, and Venezuela which has given up any pretence of abiding by its own output quota.

Analysts have said that OPEC could be facing its "last rites" if it failed to put up a united strategy to drag prices up, an economic necessity for Arab Gulf states and Iran which rely on petrodollars for at least 75 per cent of their income.

Venezuelan Energy and *Mines Minister Erwin Arrieta* said that Venezuela remained one of the strongest supporters of OPEC but that it had lost its way and needed to reassume a position of power in *the world oil market.*

Newspaper commentary in Arab Gulf states and neighbouring Iran has focused on the economic impact of falling oil prices and urged OPEC to take *corrective action.*

"OPEC looks these days to be facing its third big crisis. The current crisis looks deeper than the others as it is posing questions regarding OPEC's role and its real ability to influence the market," a front page editorial in the United Arab Emirates' Arabic-language Al Khaleej newspaper said.

"...This club whose members *produce around one* third of the world production remains a prisoner of work traditions that belong to a long dead era," the paper said.

The UAE's minister of state for finance called for restraint in government spending amid falling oil revenue and a budget deficit. Kuwait has already informed state bodies to cut spending by 25 per cent.

"...If a price war and its consequences are to be avoided, exporters should learn from past mistakes," an article in the English-language Iran News said.

The Tehran Times daily bluntly said in its editorial that the Iranian economy was "seriously sick."

Iranian president promises reforms to mend 'sick' economy

TEHRAN (AFP) — President Mohammad Khatami has said Iran's economy was suffering from grave structural problems exacerbated by tumbling oil *prices, and promised measures* to protect foreign investors.

"If we say we don't have problems, we have not told the truth," the president said in an address to the nation, published in newspapers.

"The structure of our economy is sick — whether in production, distribution or regulations," said President Khatami.

Iran's economy is in recession, starved for many years of foreign investment and now facing a collapse in world oil prices.

The government had forecast to earn $16 from the sale of each barrel of crude during the next Iranian year starting March 21, but oil revenues have collapsed as the world price has slumped below $13 per barrel.

Iran is the second largest producer of oil in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and oil exports *make up 85 per cent of the* country's hard currency earnings and up to 50 per cent of its annual budget.

President Khatami, who took office in August promising greater freedom and economic prosperity, said he had set up committees to review options in *case oil prices continued to* fall.

He also complained about the official inflation rate of 23 per cent and unemployment rate of 9.5 per cent, saying they "are a sign of illness."

The growth rate has also plunged from more than five per cent in early 1990s to around three per cent and the country faces a budget deficit of $2 billion this year.

The president said the government had solved part of the deficit problem by selling bonds and stopping to offer hard currency at the official rate, which is 60-70 per cent below the market rate.

"We have to get used to spending less hard currency," he said.

President Khatami also complained about the fall in non-oil exports and pledged work to ease reliance on oil and to find other markets.

Non-oil exports have also fallen to around $3 *billion this year, provoking* a crisis in industry and agriculture. It came after the former government imposed tough regulation three years ago to ensure the repatriation of foreign earnings and stabilise the national currency.

The president said a spe*cial committee had been* set up to study how to correct past mistakes and take measures to save the economy.

The steps include reducing red tape and removing redundant and parallel government bodies to pave the way for market-oriented transactions.

"We have asked people to share their opinions and criticise policies so that we will have a better future," the president said.

Another committee will probe state-owned companies to decide which ones need to be privatised or their managements improved.

The government said last week it had decided to privatise 2,400 state firms, incuding 30 major companies active in oil, power and petrochemicals.

"Presently the situation of management and regulations are not in favour of production or investment. Bureaucratic obstacles only lead to less competi*tion and more problems,"* the president said.

He also said the country suffered from poor management which was "not inducive to investment," and he called for "structural changes."

He also promised to protect foreign and domestic investment, recognising that "to produce, one needs security and to make profits."

He blamed a wave of radical slogans which have discouraged *investment in* Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution, describing it as a "psychological" obstacle.

"We should respect the law and protect legitimately-earned capital. Rule of law is my government's central motto, and we will do all we can to establish security," President Khatami said.

The *president, who has* pledged to seek reconciliation with the outside world, said "international conditions are presently favourable. We have an active, yet logical, foreign policy."

He nevertheless criticised the United States for seeking to isolate Iran, saying it was "beating on a hollow drum."

The president said the government would seek next year around $6 billion in foreign finance.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Things might seem to be going a little too fast, and some people could even get reckless. You like high-speed adventure, so you'll be fine. Watch out for some of the others, however. After having things go so slowly the first part of this week, there could be a little damage doe if this new speedup isn't managed carefully.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You need to take care of your money. If you aren't careful, a friend could talk you out of too much. It's nice to be generous, but not to your own disadvantage. You're generally the thrifty type, but once in a while you've been known to blow great wads of cash on pretty silly ideas. Watch out for that tendency this afternoon

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) An idea you've been trying to get across may finally go through this morning. It will help if you have somebody on your side. The two of you *can argue convincingly that you know a better way to get* the job done. Figure out all the possible consequences first. You want to make sure this will work before you put it into action.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Although you're entering a lucky phase, there's still work to be done. That will be noticeable today. Your work has been undergoing transformation recently anyway, and that will continue for a while. If you're confused, take material home tonight and study on your own time. It's a good investment.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) You and your sweetheart may have trouble making a connection. Once you get together, you may have trouble deciding where to go. Part of the problem is extremely limited resources. Your sweetheart is apt to have a brilliant idea tonight about how to have a fabulous weekend on very little cash. Work on this together.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Something needs to be done, but you may not be sure quite what. That's your assignment. Figure out the priorities and help others do the same. You have the best chance of anybody of making sense out of this chaos, so please do that. Everyone will appreciate your efforts.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You'd rather be doing just about anything than the task you've been assigned. The trouble is, you don't know how to do it right. The secret is to listen instead of continuing to ask questions. You're learning to speak a different language. Relax. This could be fun.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're going to be luckier in love for the next few weeks. The bad news is that it's going to cost you money. Be careful with finances early in the day and you can relax a little later on. Be aware of what you're spending all weekend, however. It'll be very easy to let it slip through your fingers.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Things are shifting, crumbling and possibly even falling apart. That's OK. It's a natural part of growth. Everything you've learned will be useful, but not necessarily the way you imagined. Keep your wits about you, because the action is fast and furious. If you get confused, ask for coaching from *an objective person.*

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) For the next four weeks, you'll feel your brain starting to work better. You'll be lucky, too. It won't take you as long to pick up new skills. You could make an absolutely awesome breakthrough. Might as well get used to it. You're in for a wild ride. Today, figure out where you want to end up.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) There's more money coming in. The bad news is, there's more going out, too. The trick is to manage your resources wisely. You probably think money is a necessary evil, but consider letting go of that attitude and seeing money as a tool to create wonderful things in the world. Might as well, because that's what's going to be happening.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This will be a very creative day. It could also be a little irritating. An older person may try to keep you from doing something you want. If you can express yourself clearly, you'll be able to talk that person into your way of thinking. It might take a few tries. Don't give up.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) For the last month, your focus has been on group activities. You and your team have been producing amazing results, possibly even creating miracles along the way. Use the experience you've gained in recent weeks to make a decision that will affect the entire group. Take everybody's needs into consideration.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You've been running up against the scientific, analytical types for the last month. They've got the programme all figured out and it's not what you had in mind. Well, that's going to change over the next couple of days. People will be friendlier and much more compliant. So hold out for one more day.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There are new assignments coming in, and old ones to finish. Somebody you're working with is demanding control of the situation. There are opportunities for you to come up with good ideas, but it may be difficult to implement. Don't worry. You'll be able to get more changes into effect later in the week.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) This is a wonderful day for you and tomorrow should be magnificent. If there's an endeavour you've been thinking about beginning, schedule it for first thing this morning. Travel and romance will be especially well favoured during this phase. If you don't *have plans right now,* don't worry about it. You will in the next couple of days.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) It's a good time for decisions concerning money, especially money you're borrowing. If you're thinking about getting a loan to buy something for the house, or to buy real estate, go ahead with those plans this morning. There may be difficulty in getting paperwork signed later on this afternoon, but don't *give up.*

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You're standing off to one side of an argument, waiting to see which way the chips fall. Watch a master negotiator wheel and deal and you'll learn how it's done. Actually, conditions are changing, so the person with all the rules might lose one for a change. Pay attention and comply with those rules. Never hurts to play it safe.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You've got a little time to play, but not much. You should be starting to gear up for a big job ahead. The good news is that you'll also be making more money soon. Although you don't really enjoy working hard, you don't mind making the money. *Concentrate on that when the going gets tough.*

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You have more energy and a better ability to negotiate. That'll come in handy today. If a roommate is still giving you a hard time, hold out a little longer. He or she has had the advantage for the last few weeks, but by tomorrow, you'll see the tide beginning to turn in your favour, and by Thursday it'll definitely be going your way.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Things are more stable than yesterday. Settle down and assimilate the information you've gathered. It's going to be difficult to get past the next barrier. You may just have to wait here a while. This may not be bad. You're learning quickly, but *you have to take things in stages. This is a resultful phase,* and tomorrow will be, too.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) If you're considering taking a class, one of your best friends has an excellent suggestion. He or she could get you into the right environment. You don't want to waste time learning something you won't use. You want to make a profit on any investment you make, including time and mental energy.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You'll notice a weakening of your influence and a strengthening of another person's power. That person may be in a position to help you out, however. It looks like a good day to ask for a raise, for example. Make this older person an offer he or she can't refuse, and don't wait.

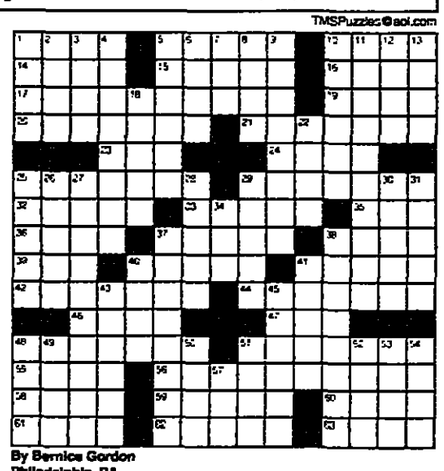
PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're being pushed to finish something you started. It has to do with paperwork, possibly for an education institution. If you're dealing with some big bureaucracy, handle that matter now. Get the chores done so you can get on to something more fun. Have a great time while you're at it.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



ACROSS
1 Advantage
5 Privileged few
10 Form of air pollution
14 Explorer Ponce de __
15 Anti-Christ
16 Prevailing trend
17 Angler's catch, perhaps
19 Nastase of tennis
20 San __ Fault
21 Unmarried folk
23 Got together
24 Collides on purpose
25 Stuck one's nose in
29 Returned some cash
32 Place or locality
33 Roundish shapes
35 Beam
36 Beer picks
37 Friendship
38 Blackbird
39 School org.
40 Thin pancake
41 Eucalyptus eater
42 "Enterprise" detectors
44 Sedating guys?
46 Actress Flynn-Boyle
47 Fish eggs
48 Chisholm Trail terminus
51 "__ Place"
55 Actress Turner
56 Michigan, Ontario, et al.
58 Stated one's case
59 Overjoy
60 Stumble
61 Knights' titles
62 Adam's son and others
63 Simple

DOWN
1 Island near Corsica
2 Bruce or Laura
3 Well-behaved
4 Gigantic
5 Tally of possessions
6 "I Remember Mama" character
7 Simpson's judge
8 Greek crosses
9 Wholly
10 Mark of shame
11 Waterwheel's power source
12 Garfield's pal
13 Lift-off pressure
18 Holds on to
22 Arrests
25 Blows with open palm
26 "48 Hrs." star
27 Cruise ship
28 Stadium roofs
29 Time charges
30 Singer Steve
31 Welsh poet Thomas
34 Bigwig's letters
37 Puts in order
38 Not extreme
40 Center
41 Hillock
43 Caesar and Waldorf, e.g.
45 Sharp mountain ridges
48 Swiss mountains
49 Indonesian island
50 __ Stanley Gardner
51 SAT test section
52 Gumbo ingredient
53 Six in Seville
54 Catch sight of
57 Feed

By Bernice Gordon
Philadelphia, PA

A	C	I	D	S		P	U	L	E	S		M	U	D
S	A	L	E	P		S	H	O	R	E		A	T	E
H	M	S	P	I	N	A	F	O	R	E		Y	U	P
			T	R	E	I	T		K	O	S		B	R	O
N	E	P	H	E	W				L	A	M	E	N	T
A	N	T		A	E	S	O	P		W	A	R		
I	R	A	N		S	A	R	I		S	C	R	I	P
L	O	M	E		T	I	G	E	R		H	Y	D	E
S	L	E	E	T		L	A	T	E		O	R	E	O
		E	D	S		S	N	A	P	S		F	A	N
L	E	T	S	U	P				L	O	R	D	L	Y
I	D	I		N	E	T		P	A	N	E			
N	I	N		A	S	E	A	S	Y	A	S	A	B	C
K	E	G		M	O	L	D	S		T	I	R	E	D
S	S	S		I	S	L	E	T		A	N	T		

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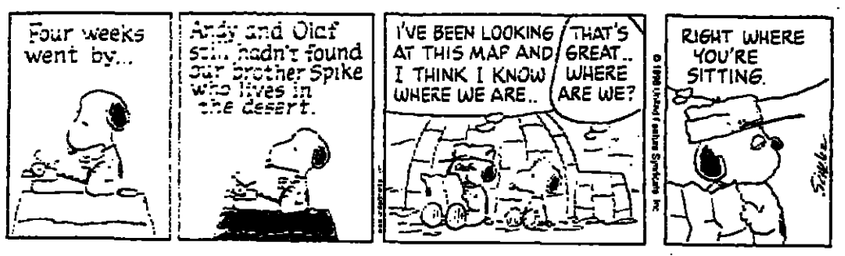
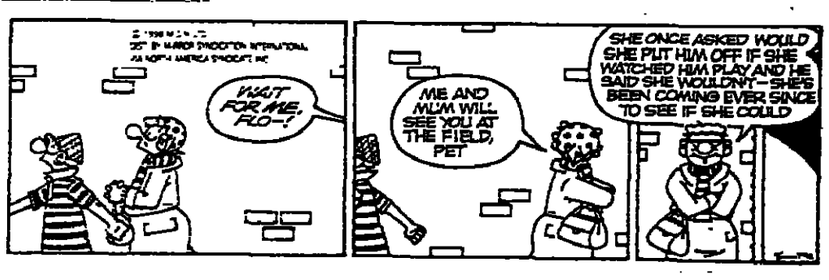
Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff

THE BETTER HALF®

By Glasbergen

"I left Stanley a pile of laundry to do, but he just hops over it—it's his version of Lover's Leap."

JUMBLE®

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

BOREP

DULEE

JOADIN

GAMNEA

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here: A "_____"

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: ADULT NOTCH ENDURE SALUTE
Answer: Found at some English homes — A TUDOR SEDAN

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Government ready to cancel tax, amend draft law on saving funds — Shahin

**THE DIRECTOR of the external operations department at the Central Bank of Jordan who headed the committee that prepared the draft law for private saving funds emphasised Tuesday that amendments will be made to some articles of the draft law. Topping the amendments will be the cancellation of the article related to imposing a tax on amounts drawn from saving funds.

He affirmed that the government is ready for dialogue and to treat the subject with all transparency and in a democratic way. "The government's first and last concern is for the beneficiary," the director, Mohammad Said Shahin, said noting that the committee which prepared the draft law has benefited from all ideas that were aired.

Mr. Shahin indicated that there is a tendency to involve representatives of the saving funds in the control commission which will be entrusted in implementing the law. He emphasised that there is no reason to take quick actions, make quick judgements or to dissolve the funds "because the door for dialogue is still open and will never be closed." Mr. Shahin denied that the draft law is in violation of the articles of the Jordanian constitution.

"The management of the funds will be the responsibility of the elected commissioners who will be chosen by the members," he explained stressing that "the government will not interfere in managing the investments of the saving funds."

Asked about the article regarding placing an investment advisor for these funds, Mr. Shahin replied: "It is expected that investment operations be managed by persons who have experience in the investment sphere. Accordingly, the management of these funds should contract an advisor to manage the fund's investment portfolio in order to optimise the interests which would dwarf the commissions that banks would charge.

Mr. Shahin indicated that the draft law will put the bases and general principles for investment policies in order to be presented to the general assemblies for approval and, as such, guarantee a high degree of financial reform. He emphasised that the draft law will not affect the present rights of the savers and that it will include principles which will ensure the funds will not be mismanaged.

The Central Bank official concluded by pointing out that the draft law was prepared with the help of advisors, lawyers and local investment experts without any assistance from foreign expertise (Al Dustour).

REUTERS REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates Prices as at 18/03/98 20:04

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.8268	0.5982	1.4898	130.09	1.4185	1799.20	2.0594	6.1267
DE Mark	0.5474	-	0.3273	0.8155	71.20	0.7764	984.57	1.1272	3.3532
GB Sterling	1.6716	3.0540	-	2.4900	217.43	2.3712	3006.82	3.4417	10.2389
CH Franc	0.6712	122.54	0.4011	-	87.30	0.9515	1206.87	138.15	4.1097
JP Yen	0.0077	1.4034	0.4594	1.1444	-	1.0896	13.82	158.18	4.7046
CA Dollar	0.7050	1.2883	0.4301	1.0486	1.09	-	1268.55	1.4543	4.3281
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0144	0.3321	0.0827	1385.04	0.7877	-	11.44	3.4012
NL Guilder	0.4856	88.69	0.2903	72.35	63.14	0.6887	873.53	-	2.9735
FR Franc	0.1632	0.2980	0.0976	24.3054	21.21	0.2314	33.58	33.5900	-

Middle Eastern Currencies

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7510	0.3770	3.6408	0.3055	3.6727	1528.00	3.4005
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2906	0.5317	5.1351	0.4308	5.1801	2155.15	4.7962
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1890	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0814	0.98	407.36	0.9066
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8808	9.9496	-	9.66	0.8102	9.74	4053.05	9.0199
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1947	1.0303	1.0303	[illegible]	0.0839	1.01	419.69	0.9340
Kuwait Dinar	3.2739	2.3212	12.2802	1.2342	11.92	[illegible]	12.02	5002.46	0.9340
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0213	0.1026	0.9913	0.0832	-	416.04	0.9259
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4640	2.4548	0.2467	2.3827	0.1999	2.4036	-	2.2255
Egyptian	0.2941	0.2085	1.1031	0.1109	1.0707	0.0898	1.0800	449.35	-

Energy

Oils	Last	Previous
Brent	11.91	11.08
W. Texas	13.86	13.63
Bonny	11.91	11.08
Dubai	10.51	10.42
UL Gas	128.00	126.00

Mid-East Currencies

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2666	0.4871	0.15952	0.39744	34.7054
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.49749	0.16292	0.40591	35.4459
KW Dinar	3.2739	5.98086	1.95886	4.88043	426.257
BH Dinar	0.3770	4.84731	1.5873	3.95413	345.304
CY Pound	1.8709	3.4179	1.119	2.7877	243.406

Metal Prices

Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz's)	289.9	290.4
Silver (oz's)	5.94	5.97
Platinum (oz's)	406	408
AL (3 Months)	#N/A N/A	#N/A N/A
CU (3 Months)	#N/A N/A	#N/A N/A
Zinc (3 Months)	#N/A N/A	#N/A N/A
Lead (3 Months)	#N/A N/A	#N/A N/A
Ni (3 Months)	#N/A N/A	#N/A N/A

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)

Period / Cncy	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	1 Year
USD	5.66	5.66	5.59	5.59	5.65
GBP	7.25	7.40	7.31	7.50	7.31
JPY	0.51	0.52	0.47	0.49	0.62
DEM	3.25	3.46	3.34	3.38	3.50
FRF	3.60	3.65	3.52	3.59	3.68
CHF	1.23	1.09	1.33	1.15	1.23
ITL	5.62	5.50	5.06	4.79	4.62

Main Equity Indices

Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	P/Close
NewYork	DOW JONES	8731.31	-18.68	-0.21	8758.71	8720.35	8749.99
Newyork	S&P 500	1080.69	0.24	0.02	1082.43	1077.77	1080.45
London	FT-SE 100	5903.6	68.7	1.18	5903.6	5831.3	5834.9
Tokyo	NIKKIE 225	16619.58	-377.62	-2.22	17022.3	16500.1	16997.2
Paris	CAC 40	3652.52	-9.11	-0.26	3690.79	3612.6	3661.63
Frankfurt	DAX	4919.72	-26.96	-0.55	4948.25	4916.17	4946.68

Energy

Commodity	Last	Delivery
Coffee (c/lbs)	155.92	Spot
Cocoa ($/ton)	1888	Spot
Sugar ($/ton)	270.3	Spot
Wheat ($/ton)	95.7	Spot
Soya (c/lbs)	27.2	Spot
Tea (stg/kg)	165	Spot
Barley ($/bsh)	0	Spot
Rice ($/ton)	400	Spot

*** JOD Cross Rates**

Currency	Buy	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
GB Sterling	1.1803	1.1862
DE Mark	0.3894	0.3913
CH Franc	0.4782	0.4806
FR Franc	0.1161	0.1167
JP Yen	0.5468	0.5495
NL Guilder	0.3454	0.3471
IT Lira	0.395	0.397

* Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

Asia still sparkles as foreign direct investment mecca

GENEVA (AFP) — Business confidence in Asia remains strong despite the current financial crisis according to a U.N. study showing that many multinational firms intend to boost investment in the region.

The joint study by the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), published Wednesday, questioned 500 of the world's top companies, but not banks, on their investment intentions in East and South East Asia.

One quarter of the 198 firms that responded said they planned to boost direct investment in the region in the short to medium term and 62 per cent said they would continue existing business plans.

Just 12 per cent of respondents said they were planning investment cut-backs.

The vast majority believe direct investment prospects in the area had not changed, with 13 per cent saying they had actually improved, according to the survey which was conducted in mid-February.

Financial turmoil in Asia began in July with devaluation of the Thai baht. That move sparked off a successive round of regional currency falls which led to a rout of most Asian stockmarkets.

"The results clearly show that multinational corporations are keenly interested in the region for direct investment in the production of goods and services," UNCTAD Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero told journalists.

"This augurs well for recovery in the region," he added.

Said ICC Secretary General Maria Livanos Cattaui: "This is a resounding vote of confidence in the economic fundamentals of East and South East Asia and the region's long-term prospects."

European companies, late to enter the Asian arena, appear to be the most upbeat, with 34 per cent actively seeking to expand their operations in Asia and only 11 per cent planning reductions. That compares with 19 per cent for North American and Japanese firms planning expansion and 10 per cent for those in developing Asian countries.

About 86 per cent of the Europeans who sent in responses said their long-term view of the region remained unchanged, compared to 84 per cent of Americans and 56 per cent of Japanese.

Ms. Cattaui said the survey stressed the differences between the reactions of direct investors and those of portfolio investors and banks whose actions — a stampede from Asian stock and currency markets — had been the centre of attention.

Direct investment was motivated by "strategic interests," such as market access, and tended to involve long-term relationships, she said.

While equity investment and bank lending to the worst hit countries — Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines — slumped during the second half of last year, foreign direct investment flows to the region are estimated to remain close to pre-crisis levels, the ICC and UNCTAD said.

Foreign direct investment flows to the five countries last year totalled an estimated $80 billion in 1997 compard to $77 billion in 1996, according to UNCTAD and the ICC.

Lower costs for such things as property, land and locally-made equipment because of plunging currencies "create immediate incentives for additional direct investment" senior UNCTAD investment expert said.

But a slump in growth has already reduced demand in some Asian countries and this could slow down inward foreign investment flows for businesses geared to domestic markets, particularly those in service sectors.

The survey also found that Asian firms plan to invest mainly in neighbouring countries as the crisis restricted the financial ability of quite a few to target offshore markets.

Japan credit crunch rattles small business

TOKYO (Agencies) — Japan's credit crunch is hastening bankruptcies, rattling small business owners and being blamed for a string of suicides — but there is little consensus on its implications for the nation's beleaguered economy.

The severity of the credit crunch prompted business leaders to call on Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to take more steps to ease the problem.

Faced with the introduction of stricter supervision in April, Japanese banks began restricting loans late last year in an effort to boost their capital ratios.

Banks are refusing to roll over loans, calling them in early or asking for more collateral. In addition, they are generally reluctant to extend new credit, experts and small business groups say.

Economists differ on the seriousness of the threat posed to Japan's ailing economy by the credit crunch and by the spectre of increasing bankruptcies, with some saying unfit firms must be allowed to fail but others fearing too many collapses could batter confidence.

Surveys show firms of all sizes and across all industries are finding borrowing from banks more difficult. In some cases, banks are so desperate they are asking large companies to return loans for just the last day of March, when they close their books, one government survey said.

But it is small and medium-sized firms, which have fewer avenues for obtaining funds, that are having the toughest time.

"The crunch has come at the same time as the economy is doing badly and firms that would normally have coped with a loan to tide them over are now not getting one," said Koji Harakawa, planning and research director at the Federation of Small Business Associations.

Small and medium-sized firms account for 99 per cent of Japan's total number of companies, 80 per cent of output and 70 per cent of the workforce.

Bankruptcies directly triggered by the credit crunch have begun to emerge and will rise significantly, said Noriyoshi Kobayashi, senior researcher at Teikoku Databank, a private research firm that gathers information on business failures.

"The credit crunch is another kick in the teeth for firms already in pain," he said. "Small business owners are rattled."

Two medium-sized listed firms, Food Trader Toshoku Ltd. and Daido concrete, were recently forced to file for bankruptcy when they could not obtain funds.

The sense that the credit crunch is making bad times worse has been strengthened recently by the triple suicide of the owners of three car parts firms, followed by the suicide of a picture frame company president and his wife who left a note reading: "We can't meet our payroll. Please forgive us."

The government has embarked on a series of measures to ease the crunch, with huge increases in the amount of funding made available through government-affiliated financial institutions and 30 trillion yen in public funds earmarked to help banks boost their capital.

But few expect a quick end to the credit crunch or even a marked easing after April, when banks that meet the new rules on capital will have some breathing room.

"It is naive to think that the credit crunch will naturally disappear after April," Trade Minister Mitsuo Horiuchi said last week, repeating calls for the finance ministry to advise banks not to unduly restrict credit.

Critics add that while the 30 trillion yen will help to bail out banks and stabilise the financial sector, it will do little to ease credit since banks are not about to abandon the more rigorous lending standards just introduced.

Indeed, some economists see the weeding out of inefficient firms as desirable.

From such a perspective, government measures to ease credit were more of a hindrance than a help, said Mamoru Yamaguchi, economist at Nikko Research Centre.

"These firms are going to go bankrupt anyway. The measures are just putting off problems for another day, maintaining inefficiencies and going against the spirit of deregulation," he said, arguing the economy would not recover with any speed unless many firms were allowed to fail. Most economists said, however, the more optimistic among them said the number of credit crunch bankruptcies was still small and rises in government lending would help healthy firms, adding that there was only merit in more rigorous standards for bank lending.

It was not necessarily harder to borrow money, rather than the right price for lending was finally being charged, they said.

Meanwhile, Japan's corporate capital investment in the next fiscal year from April is expected to fall for the first time in four years due to a setback in the high-technology sectors, a report has said.

Combined capital spending of both manufacturers and non-manufacturers in the year to March 1999 is likely to fall 4.6 per cent from the current year, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun business daily said.

The newspaper's survey, based on 1,168 manufacturers and 967 non-manufacturers, attributed a 7.1 per cent drop in the manufacturing sector's investment to the overall decline.

Particularly large falls in capital spending were seen in the electric machinery and auto sectors, which were the top two sectors in terms of investment value, it said.

Combined investment in the electrical machinery sector, which included microchip makers, was forecast to fall 7.9 per cent in the year to March 1999 to 2,169 billion yen ($16.8 billion), the daily said.

Slowing investment in this sector was well reflected in moves by the top five microchip makers to cut capital spending for dynamic random access memory (DRAM) chips after being hit by falling prices, it said.

All top five microchip makers — Hitachi Ltd., Toshiba Corp., Mitsubishi Electric Corp., NEC Corp. and Fujitsu Ltd. — had downgraded their year to March 1998 earnings forecast due to drops in DRAM prices.

The auto and auto parts sector is expected to see a 4.8 per cent decline to 1,003 billion yen amid weak domestic sales, the daily said.

Among non-manufacturers, the telecommunication sector's investment was seen falling 5.5 per cent to 3,297 billion yen in the term.

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp., the nation's single largest investor, would cut its year to March 1999 spending by 7.4 per cent after having completed its shift to digital switch boards, it said.

Other telecommunication carriers' investment for mobile telephone facilities also started to decline after they actively boosted capacity to meet demand in recent years, it added.

In the current fiscal year to March, overall capital investment was forecast to increase 3.3 per cent from a year earlier, with that of manufacturers up 7.1 per cent and non-manufacturers up 1.0 per cent, it said.

South Korean markets staggering with huge corporate debt

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea is staggering under huge corporate debts which will keep the stock market range-bound and dampen speedy recovery hopes despite the successful rollover of short-term bank debt last week by international creditors.

"We are now facing the bigger, internal problems of looming corporate failures. The currency crisis has masked the liquidity problems of local companies," Boram Securities Chun Young-Dong said.

A corporate liquidity squeeze may hit the markets from April when the extension of maturities on commercial paper expires, along with some 60 per cent of $48.4 billion in short-term corporate debt coming due this year, the analyst told AFX-Asia, an AFP financial affilate.

Government officials here welcomed the agreement last week in New York to restructure $21.3 billion in short-term debt owed by South Korean banks into government-backed liabilities with longer maturities.

"It will help stabilise the nation's short-term liquidity," said Vice Finance Minister Chung Duck-Koo.

But currency dealers called it "no more than a postponement in repayment," saying the debt exchange agreement had already been priced into the market and provided no fresh support for the South Korean won.

The won was firmer Friday trading at the 1,520-1,550 range.

"The rebound in the won reflects just the balance in supply and demand — not the rollover. The won will only be able to recover after more overseas funds come in," Shinhan Bank's Seo Myong-Kook said.

The L.G. Economic Research Institute estimated South Korea's foreign currency demand this year at $117.5 billion. But the maximum funds available will barely reach $83.7 billion, it said.

The stock market also showed no particular reaction to the rollover. The composite index closed the week slightly down at 533.56.

Brokers said the market would remain rangebound into the second quarter, reflecting underlying concerns about the economy at home and the Indonesia crisis.

"Without dramatic change in the Indonesia situation, investment sentiment will remain weak," Boram Securities' Chun Young-Dong said.

The domestic political stalemate also left foreigners sceptical about the government's ability to carry through reforms dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he said.

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European Cup Winners' Cup

Chelsea face Real Betis; Vicenza relaxed

PARIS (AFP) — Chelsea will continue their mix-and-match selection policy when they defend a 2-1 European Cup Winners' Cup quarter-final first-leg lead against the Spaniards of Real Betis at Stamford Bridge on Thursday evening.

New player-coach Gianluca Vialli has rung the changes for each game since taking over from Ruud Gullit.

The Blues thrashed Crystal Palace 6-2 in midweek but Vialli then made six changes and Chelsea slumped to a 2-1 loss to West Ham at the weekend.

Further switches are likely on Thursday with both Vialli, who was not among the substitutes on Saturday, and his fellow Italian international Gianfranco Zola, both likely to be recalled.

"I'm a new manager and I'm still trying to understand the best way *for the team to play*," said Vialli, who — with six goals — is the joint leading scorer in the competition.

Chelsea have lost four of their five Premiership matches under Vialli and are aware they cannot afford to relax against the dangerous visitors from Seville, who have drawn with Atletico Madrid and beaten Salamanca in their last two outings.

"We know Thursday night's game is by no means over with," said coach Graham Rix.

Chelsea expect to be without England leftback Graeme Le Saux, who has been sidelined with an ankle injury, but combative skipper Dennis Wise returns after a two-match suspension.

The Londoners know they would go through to the semifinals on the away goals rule even if they lose the return match 1-0.

"A draw would be a wonderful result for us on Thursday but we just can't stop playing our football to achieve it," said Vialli. "We've got to play our game and yet still be aware and very concentrated defensively."

Betis will be without two suspended players: defender Roberto Solozabal and midfielder Fernando Sanchez and Vialli is convinced Betis will replace them with attackers.

"We know they will have to come here and try to do exactly what they did in the second half over there — throwing everybody forward," said Vialli.

Bookmakers make Chelsea the 7-4 favourites to win the trophy after their away win. German club VfB Stuttgart and Italy's Vicenza are second favourites at 5-2.

Vicenza crushed Roda Kerkrade 4-1 in the first leg in Holland, making the second leg in Italy a near formality.

Roda coach Martin Jol was sacked after Roda's directors "lost confidence" in his abilities following the humiliating defeat. He was replaced by the German coach Peter Neururer.

Vicenza, led by Pasquale Luiso, who like Vialli has scored six goals in the competition so far, are unlikely to be too inconvenienced by the absence of suspended duo Davide Belotti (defence) and Domenico Di Carlo (midfield) against Roda.

Stuttgart and Lokomotiv Moscow both forced first leg draws away from home: Stuttgart finishing 1-1 at Slavia Prague and Lokomotiv Moscow soaking up non-stop pressure away to AEK Athens and holding on for a 0-0 draw.

Lokomotiv will be looking to emulate compatriots Spartak, who stunned Ajax Amsterdam to advance to the semifinals of the UEFA Cup earlier in the week.

Stuttgart, bizarrely, are having trouble finding enough fans to take an interest in their European campaign.

Only 13,500 tickets for Thursday's return leg game against Prague had been sold by Tuesday.

On the positive side, Stuttgart's injury problems of the last fortnight have come good at the right time with Bulgarian playmaker *Krassimir Balakov, Zvonimir Soldo*, Romanian striker Florin Raducioiu, Martin Spanring and Mathias Hagner all back in training and available for selection. Striker Fredi Bobic got through his comeback match at the weekend after a hamstring pull and will head the Germans' attack.

His attacking partner Jonathon Akpoborie, though, is still out with a knee injury.

"We have to lift ourselves against Prague a few notches higher than we have done in recent weeks," said coach Joachim Loew. "We are by no means through yet."

Iran sports chief grilled over U.S. contacts, women's football

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's moderate sports chief has been summoned to parliament for questioning about an upcoming visit to the United States by Iranian wrestlers and talk of allowing women to play football, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

Mostafa Hashemi-Taba, *head of the* physical education organisation, was called to a secret session of the assembly on Tuesday by three hardline conservative MPs — Mohammad-Reza Falker, Ali Movahedi Savoji and Ahmad Nejabat.

Hashemi-Taba, answering questions from Nejabat, said the issue of women's football "is out of our hands and it needs *a decree from senior religious jurists*" to lift the ban.

He also said that it had to be ascertained if the proper facilities existed in Iran for the sport for women.

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iranian women have been facing restrictions in the sports field.

But in recent years, moderate officials have taken measures to make it possible for women to play certain sports in all-female arenas.

Faezeh Hashemi, daughter of former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, is a strong advocate of women's sports, and she recently said women may be allowed to play football.

Hardliners are particularly opposed because football has to be played on large outdoor fields, making it difficult to keep men from watching uncovered female athletes.

The other two MPs, Falker and Savoji, questioned Hashemi-Taba "mainly on sports contacts with America," according to Jomhuri Islami newspaper. They "criticised him and asked for explanation," it said.

Iran said last week it would take part in the World Cup free-style wrestling competition in Stillwater, Oklahoma, on April 3-5.

A team of American wrestlers visited Iran a month ago for the first time since the 1979 Islamic revolution to take part in a friendly competition.

Their presence led to the American flag being raised in respect for the first time at an official ceremony here since the revolution.

The Americans said they were surprised by the attention and hospitality they received.

*Tehran and Washington broke diplo*matic ties in 1980, after Iranian revolutionaries seized the U.S. embassy and held its staff hostage.

Iran has taken part in two wrestling competitions in the United States in recent years.

Inter, Atletico squeeze home, join Lazio and Spartak in UEFA Cup semis

Aston Villa soccer star Ugo Ehiogu (C) heads clear from his own goalkeeper Mark Bosnich (R), watched by Atletico Madrid player Christian Vieri (Reuters photo)

PARIS (AFP) — Nigerian international Taribo West scored in the first minute of extra-time to lift Italian giants Inter Milan past the gutsy Germans of Schalke on Tuesday night and into the semifinals of the UEFA Cup.

West's close-range headed goal gave Inter a 2-1 aggregate victory after a dramatic quarter-final, second-leg contest and saw them join compatriots Lazio in the final four.

Inter appeared to be cruising by virtue of their 1-0 first leg win until Belgian striker Michael Goossens unleashed a last-minute goal for Schalke in Gelsenkirchen.

Goossens' swinging right-foot shot from the edge of the area lifted Schalke to a 1-0 lead on the night, forced the contest to 1-1 on aggregate and sent the game into extra-time. Then came West's decider.

The win saw Inter avenge their loss to Schalke in last year's final of the same competition.

Lazio advanced 3-2 on aggregate after a 2-2 draw away to French club Auxerre and Atletico Madrid of Spain and Spartak Moscow of Russia joined the Italian sides in the semis.

Atletico, without a European trophy since 1962, lost 2-1 away to former European champions Aston Villa in Birmingham, but an early away goal from *Jose Caminero proved cru*cial for the Spaniards.

Villa hit back with goals from Ian Taylor and Stan Collymore late in the game but went out on the away goals rule after the sides finished 2-2 on aggregate.

Collymore's stunning goal, a blistering shot from the edge of the area, gave Villa hopes of reaching their first European semi-final since they won the European Cup in 1982 but Atletico defended smartly over the final quarter hour.

Manager John Gregory made a public apology to his predecessor, Brian Little, after Villa bowed out.

"Sorry, Brian. We let you down, mate. We're thinking of you," he said.

"We won the game on the night and that was no mean feat," he added. "We did not get into our stride in the first half. They went 1-0 up and we had a mountain to climb. We did not mind doing that and we went so close."

In-form Lazio, seeking their first European trophy, scored twice in the first 13 minutes and then held on for their draw with Auxerre in France's Chablis wine country.

Roberto Mancini, with a seventh-minute penalty, and Guerino Gottardi, with a 13th-minute shot, scored as Lazio completed a 3-2 aggregate win after their 1-0 home triumph in the first leg two weeks ago.

The Rome club increased their unbeaten record to 21 matches dating back to November, but had to survive some uncomfortable moments late in the contest.

"This just carries on our superb season," said Lazio's Swedish coach Sven-Goran Eriksson. "It is incredible. We could win everything now."

Lazio's aggregate win saw them end a run of losses two years running to French clubs in European competition, while Auxerre maintained their unwanted record of never having advanced against Italian opposition — despite two goals from ace goal poacher Stephane Guivarc'h.

"It was a pity we lost our confidence and conceded those two early goals," said Guivarc'h. "We dominated the rest of the match and it was clearly a game we could have won."

Alexander Shirko scored with five minutes remaining as Spartak Moscow downed Ajax Amsterdam 1-0 at home to seal their place in the final four.

Shirko's sixth goal of the competition gave Spartak victory in both legs of the quarter-final match. The Russian side won the first leg 3-1 in Amsterdam two weeks earlier and advanced 4-1 on aggregate.

Shirko, who also scored two goals in the first leg of the quarter-final, rounded off a counter-attack with a precise finish to delight a 32,000 crowd on a freezing Moscow night.

Dutch keeper Edwin van der Sar stopped Shirko's first shot, but the striker made no mistake when the ball rebounded to him.

Ajax, winners of six European trophies in their history, attacked for long periods of the game but were unable to find a way past the well-drilled Spartak defence. Even the late addition of substitutes Benni McCarthy and Jari Litmanen failed to pay dividends with Finnish international Litmanen squandering three glorious scoring opportunities.

Croatian Alen Boksic (C) of Lazio of Rome shoots, watched by Franck Rabarivoni of Auxerre during their second leg UEFA Cup quarter-final (Reuters photo)

Brazilian Ronaldo (R) of Italy's Inter Milan passes Yves Eigenrauch of Germany's title-holder Schalke 04 during the second leg UEFA quarter-final match in Gelsenkirchen. Inter Milan won 1-0 in the first leg (Reuters photo)

SCOREBOARD

UEFA Cup

Quarter-final, second-leg matches

Spartak Moscow	1	Ajax Amsterdam	0
Spartak Moscow win 4-1 on aggregate			
Auxerre	2	Lazio	2
Lazio win 3-2 on aggregate			
Aston Villa	2	Atletico Madrid	2
Aggregate 2-2. Atletico Madrid won on away goals			
Schalke 04	1	Inter Milan	2
Inter Milan won 2-1 on aggregate			

FA Cup

Quarter-final

Sheffield United	1	Coventry City	1
Sheff Utd win 3-1 on penalties			
West Ham United	1	Arsenal	1
Arsenal win 4-3 on penalties			

Friendly match

Guingamp	[illegible]	Iran	0

NBA

Atlanta	117	Toronto	105
Denver	90	Washington	89
New York	100	Philadelphia	96
Orlando	99	Vancouver	92
Chicago	90	Indiana	84
Dallas	99	Boston	93
Houston	96	Milwaukee	91
Phoenix	107	Sacramento	80
Cleveland	96	Portland	82
LA Clippers	107	Golden State	102

NHL

Chicago	5	Buffalo	3
Detroit	4	Edmonton	3
Vancouver	4	Florida	2
Dallas	4	Los Angeles	3

GOREN BRIDGE

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WHO NEEDS ACES II?

North-South vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH
♠ J 6 5
♥ K 9
♦ Q 10 2
♣ K Q 9 7 3

WEST
♠ 10 2
♥ Q 10 8 7
♦ J 9 8 7 4
♣ A 5

EAST
♠ K Q 9 8 4
♥ 4 3 2
♦ 6 5
♣ J 10 4

SOUTH
♠ A 7 3
♥ A J 6 5
♦ A K 3
♣ 8 6 2

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening lead: Ten of ♣

Last week we showed a hand where West had to jettison an ace to assure promoting a trump for the setting trick. Here's another reason where it is necessary.

The auction is a case of simple arithmetic. With a combined count of 27, it would seem that declarer should have an easy road to nine tricks. And so it would have been had West not found the devilish lead of the ten of spades.

Declarer ducked the spade in both dummy and the closed hand as East signaled with the nine, and held up again when West continued with the two of spades to the eight. That was a debatable action — while it was right in some instances, the fall of the spotcards strongly suggests that spades were 5-2 and the contract would succeed if West held the ace of clubs, or fail if East held that card.

The second holdup proved fatal as the cards lay. East continued with a third spade, forcing out the ace, and West found the brilliant play of jettisoning the ace of clubs.

Declarer tried bravely to come to nine tricks. The king and queen of clubs were cashed, West discarding a diamond, and since it was clear that another club would be fatal, declarer cleared the diamond suit, cashed the king of hearts and then tried to endplay West by running the nine of hearts. But West refused to win the trick, and declarer was stuck in dummy with nothing but clubs to play. East took the rest of the tricks for down one!

TODAY AT

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Mike Myers & Elizabeth Hurley ... in
AUSTIN POWERS: International Man of Mystery -
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL: [illegible]
PHILADELPHIA '2'
Val Kilmer & Elizabeth Shue... in
THE SAINT
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL: [illegible]
PLAZA
The biggest cinema production
TITANIC
Shows: 12:00, 3:00, 7:00, 10:30 p.m.

CINEMA TEL:5677420
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Adel Imam & Yusra ... in
RISALA ILA AL WALI
(ARABIC)
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30
TITANIC SHOWS: 9:30 P.M
LONG KISS GOODNIGHT
Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30

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TITANIC
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GALLERIA 1
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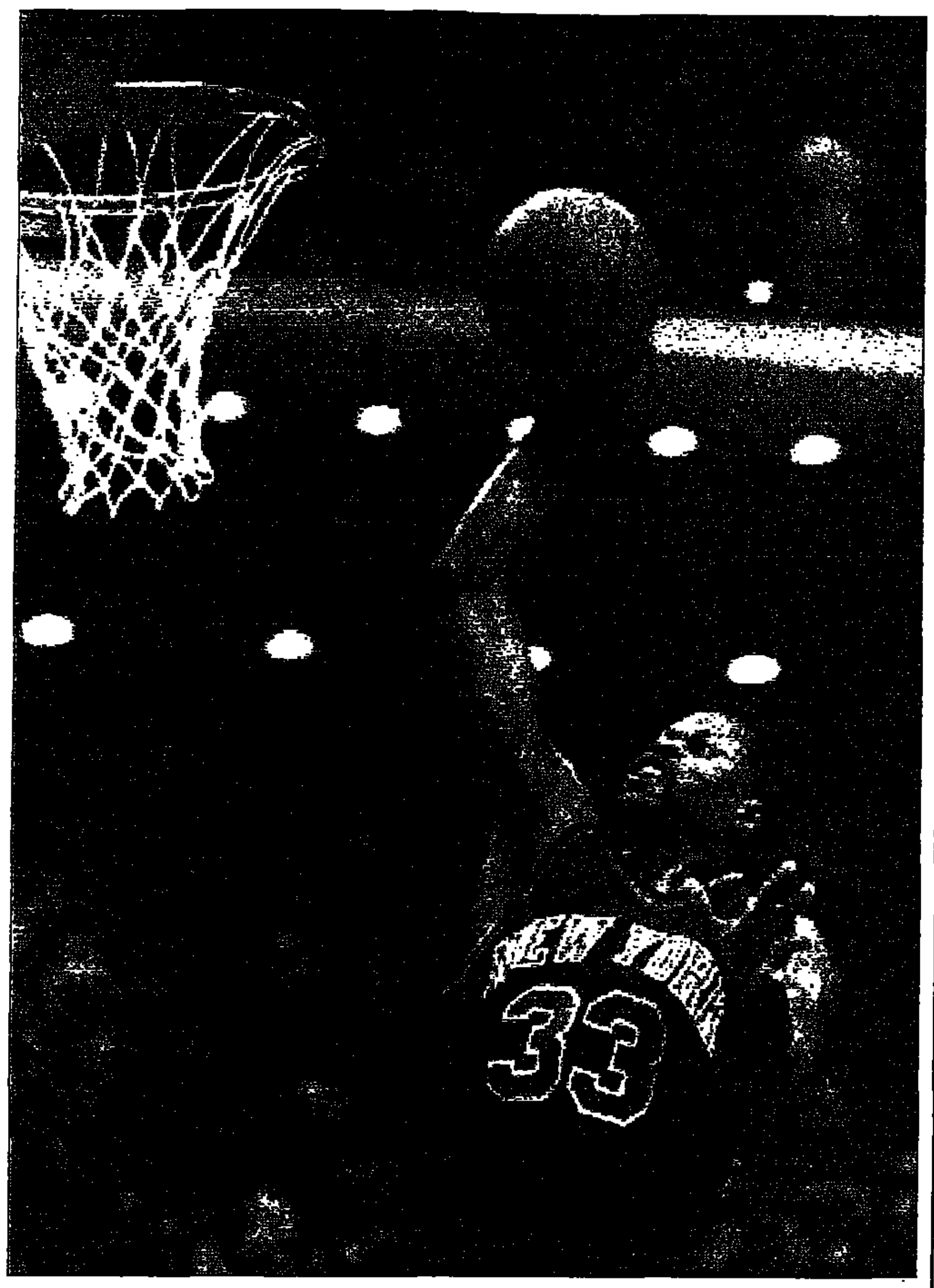

Patrick Ewing

Ewing plans to return to Knicks for playoffs

NEW YORK (AFP) — New York Knicks center Patrick Ewing, expected to miss the remainder of the National Basketball Association season with a dislocated wrist, plans to return for the playoffs.

"I would like to come back during the season, but the doctors say that is unrealistic," Ewing said here Tuesday.

Ewing suffered the injury December 20 at Milwaukee and underwent surgery the next day. He had the cast and three pins removed from the wrist February 15 and has made exceptional progress in the past month.

While Ewing has targeted the first round of the playoffs for his return, Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy said the best scenario is for the All-Star center to come back for the last three games of the season.

"I'm following all the instructions the doctors have given me. I don't want to do anything stupid to hurt my chances," Ewing said. "All through the rehab and all through the time in the cast, I kept my mind strong. I kept thinking about coming back."

Ewing has increased his range of motion to 60 per cent and his strength to 50 per cent 12 weeks after undergoing surgery to re-set the bone and repair torn ligaments. He wore a wrist support here Tuesday.

NBA clubs must declare playoff rosters on April 20. The Knicks are sixth in the Eastern Conference, ahead of Cleveland and Washington in the chase for eight playoff spots and two games better than ninth-place New Jersey.

The Knicks are 20-18 without Ewing but have dropped six of their past seven games. Ewing was averaging team highs of 20.8 points and 10.2 rebounds before the injury.

Ewing, who signed a four-year, $68 million contract before the season, was hurt after being shoved by Bucks center Andrew Lang and falling hard to the floor.

Ewing, 35, had not missed more than six games in any of the last 10 seasons. Ewing entered the season with career averages of 23.6 points and 10.4 rebounds in 913 games. He eclipsed 22,000 career points earlier this season and needs 222 rebounds to become just the sixth player in history with 20,000 points and 10,000 rebounds.

Zagallo, Pele agree Brazil are favourites

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) — Pele and Brazil coach Mario Zagallo put their feuding aside on Tuesday and agreed the Samba stars must be favourites to win a fifth World Cup.

Pele, now Brazilian sports minister, had harsh words to say about Brazil's poor showing in last month's CONCACAF Gold Cup, where they lost to the United States in the semi-finals.

But Zagallo said the pair, who together helped mastermind World Cup wins in 1958, 1962 and 1970, enjoyed an "amicable" discussion by phone and he insisted no rancour remained between them.

Pele had derided Brazil's performances against Jamaica, against whom they laboured to a 1-0 third-place playoff win, after earlier drawing with the Jamaicans and Guatemala in group games.

"Pele is very important for everything Brazilian football represents — now more than ever, at a time when unity is needed as Brazil goes for a fifth World Cup," Zagallo said.

First Division Basketball Championship

Jazireh meet Ahli tonight ... weather permitting

By Aleen Bannayan
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Al Jazireh face Al Ahli tonight before the preliminary round of the First Division Basketball Championship ends Friday. That is if the weather does not disrupt the schedule causing a delay in the six-team championship.

Al Jazireh head into the match leading the standings and appearing poised to retain the title for another season.

Last week, they managed a 92-84 win over last year's third placed Al Orthodoxi who had easily beat Al Ahli 74-49 in a clear demonstration of the fact that fans will certainly enjoy more competitive matches especially with the top-three playoffs initiated this season.

According to Jordan Basketball Federation (JBF) President Mudar Majdoub, Thursday night's match will go ahead "weather permitting."

"We do not plan any change on the schedule so far. However, if the effect of the snowstorm increases we will then contact the two clubs and announce any change Thursday morning," Majdoub told the Jordan Times Wednesday.

Al Ahli who came in second last year seem in no state to fight for the title this season and are expected to have a tough match against the all-round better prepared Al Jazireh who appear to be the favourites having lifted their game during the West Asian Zone basketball qualifiers which they hosted last month.

Al Ahli have been struggling with technical and managerial obstacles for the past two seasons and are still trying to get the right combination while improving the physical and overall team conditioning resulting from relatively no serious pre-season training.

Having started training late while looking for a coach amidst the return of their star veterans Yousef Zaghloul and Marwan Ma'touq to the lineup after two seasons.

Insiders expect their incoherent lineup to get a much-needed boost if and when veteran Naser Bushnaq joins the lineup soon.

On Friday, newcomers Al Jeel face Al Orthodoxi. The unknown team is enjoying a streak of confidence after an unexpected 76-67 win over Al Hussein and a 61-60 win over Al Jalil.

An important match precedes that at the Sports Palace when winless Al Hussein meet Al Jalil. Both teams will be seeking to score a win that will give them the chance to avoid the relegation-threatened last-place.

Al Jazireh's win last year ended a 30-year domination by rivals Orthodoxi and Al Ahli.

While Al Orthodoxi had an undisputed reign from 1976-1989, Al Ahli won the title in 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994 aided by the signing of Bushnaq.

Al Orthodoxi came back to win in 1991, 1995 and 1996 and seem the season's serious contenders for the title.

STANDINGS

Team	P	W	L	Sf	Sa	Pts
Jazireh	4	4	-	354	240	8
Orthodoxi	4	3	1	325	239	7
Ahli	4	3	1	282	245	7
Jeel	4	2	2	250	287	6
Hussein	4	-	4	226	328	4
Jalil	4	-	4	213	311	4

E. German drugs trial opens to reveal extent of cheating

BERLIN (AFP) — The drugs trial of four former East German swimming coaches and two doctors opened here Wednesday to reveal the extent of the cheating and physical damage done to the athletes that went on in the former Communist state.

The accused are Dieter Lindemann, 47, who went on to coach multi-Olympic gold medallist Franziska van Almsick, Volker Frischke, 53, Rolf Glaser, 58, Dieter Krause, 50, and doctors Bernd Pansold, 55, and Dieter Binus, 58.

The four coaches, who all worked at the Dynamo Berlin club, and the two doctors are accused of inflicting grievous bodily harm on 19 minors from 1974 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The allegedly dark past of the four coaches have not stopped three of them enjoying lucrative careers since the fall of the Berlin Wall with both Lindemann and Frischke being employed by the German Swimming Federation from 1990 until they were charged.

Glaser still coaches Austrian swimmers while Krause was never re-employed as a coach.

The six may well be just the tip of the iceberg as there are another 680 potential defendants, chief of whom is the former head of East Germany's national sport's federation (DTSB) Manfred Ewald, who have been investigated by 60 special investigators, trawling through detailed Stasi (the former East German secret police) files.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Injuries hit two AL favourites

LAKELAND, Florida (AFP) — All-star catcher Sandy Alomar of Cleveland and New York Yankees infielder Luis Sojo have been injured, weakening both American League favourites as the baseball season openers near. Alomar suffered a strained groin chasing a wild pitch in an exhibition game and will not play again before the Indians, reigning AL champions, play their season opener in two weeks at Seattle. Sojo will miss four weeks with a stress fracture in his left hand.

McAllister urges Ferguson rethink

LONDON (AFP) — Former Scotland captain Gary McAllister on Tuesday urged 'retired' striker Duncan Ferguson to change his mind and lead Scotland's World Cup finals challenge in France which begins in Paris on June 10. McAllister, who has been ruled out of the finals with a knee injury, received support from former England manager Bobby Robson, who said it would be a "tragedy" if Everton's big, aggressive striker did not make himself available for the world's leading football event.

Reports link Drexler to coaching post

HOUSTON (AFP) — Houston Rockets All-Star guard Clyde Drexler will leave the National Basketball Association club to coach at his college, the University of Houston, reports here Tuesday said.

Two radio stations said Drexler might be named to the post as early as Wednesday and would hire two assistants who were former teammates on the college club that finished second in the 1983 U.S. college finals.

Drexler and school officials would neither confirm nor deny the reports and Rockets spokesman Tim Frank said, "he is a Rocket, he has a contract through the rest of the season and there's no doubt about his commitment to the Rockets for the rest of the year.

"It's really a non-issue to us," he said. "Clyde is a free agent at the end of the season and if coaching is what he wants to do, then more power to him. But tonight and the rest of the year, he's a Rocket."

His departure should be a concern to a club standing seventh in the Western Conference, especially one that won NBA titles in 1994 and 1995.

Drexler, 35, leads Rocket scorers with 18.6 points and 5.5 assists a game. He also shoots 43 per cent and pulls down 4.8 rebounds a game but has feuded with teammate Charles Barkley this season.

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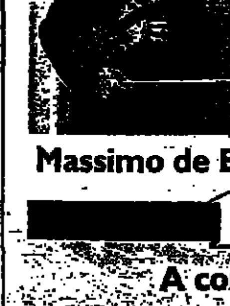

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Butler to meet Iraqi experts in Vienna on Friday

VIENNA (AFP) — The head of the U.N. Special Commission on disarming Iraq (UNSCOM), Richard Butler, is to meet Iraqi experts in Vienna Friday to discuss visits to so-called presidential sites, officials said Wednesday.

Mr. Butler and an Iraqi delegation will discuss technical questions related to the visits, agreed to in the Feb. 23 accord struck by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan in Baghdad, said officials at the U.N.'s Vienna offices.

A U.N. source here said that Iraq asked the United Nations to organise the meeting in Vienna on neutral territory, and not at the U.N.'s New York headquarters as originally scheduled.

The inspections will be carried out by a special team of inspectors from UNSCOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and diplomats, led by Sri Lankan Jayantha Dhanapala.

While in Vienna Mr. Butler will also meet the IAEA's new head Mohammad El Baradei.

Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz said on Tuesday that Iraq has no confidence in Mr. Butler, but will work with him anyway. "We have no confidence in him because he deliberately lies and because he is an American instrument," he said in an interview with an Abu Dhabi television station.

But Mr. Aziz added that "when he comes we will work with him as the head of UNSCOM and an international official, in line with the accord" signed between Iraq and Mr. Annan in Baghdad.

Mr. Butler will leave Vienna on Saturday for Baghdad. He said Friday that he thought inspections of the presidential sites could begin a few days after his departure from the Iraqi capital, scheduled for March 26.

The announcement came as international and Iraqi experts were meeting in Vienna from Wednesday in an attempt to account for Iraqi germ warfare agents that could threaten Baghdad's neighbours.

The meetings will last from March 18-27, according to a U.N. spokesman in New York.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf said in Doha Wednesday the next visit to Baghdad by Mr. Butler will not be linked to the start of inspections of presidential sites.

"The visit of Mr. Butler is a routine mission which is not linked to the inspection of presidential sites," Mr. Sahhaf told a press conference in the Qatari capital.

AMMAN DRESSED IN WHITE

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan shows U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his wife Nane Annan, Amman from the top of the Citadel on Wednesday. Mr. Annan, who arrived here late Tuesday is on the first leg of a nine-day tour of the Middle East (See story on page 1) (photo by Yousef Allan)

U.S. oil firms left out, frustrated as Iran opens up for business

DUBAI (AFP) — U.S. oil companies are frustrated by Washington's sanctions against Iran that will leave them out of a string of juicy contracts in the Islamic republic, experts and industry officials said.

"The clamour from U.S. companies resentful at losing opportunities to foreign competitors is rising," British expert Rosemary Hollis told delegates at the Middle East Petroleum and Gas Conference in the Gulf emirate of Dubai.

In the "battle for contracts" in Iran, the U.S. sanctions are turning to the advantage of the Europeans, said Ms. Hollis, who heads the Middle East programme at London's Royal Institute of International Affairs.

"If Washington does come round to the view that its policy is not working, and that the domestic developments in Iran would justify a change of approach, the Europeans will immediately start worrying that their U.S. competitors will outsmart them in the battle for contracts."

Iran announced at the conference its plans to invite foreign oil firms to take part in new onshore and offshore exploration and development projects, and downstream ventures in refining, gas liquefaction, gas pipelines and others.

The director of exploration at the state-owned National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), S.M. Mohaddes, set the reserves which remain to be discovered in Iran at between 20 and 30 billion barrels.

U.S. oil companies expressed their readiness to do business in the Islamic republic which has one of the world's largest oil reserves, estimated at some 90 billion barrels.

But they can't because of a ban imposed in 1995 under an executive order signed by U.S. President Bill Clinton to punish Tehran for allegedly supporting terrorism.

The Syntroleum Corporation, specialised in gas-to-liquid fuel conversion technology, is interested in Iran's gas wealth which stands at 23,000 billion cubic metres, second only to Russia's.

"Gas-to-liquid technology is something that could be valuable to Iran because of their very large resources. Iran flares a large amount of gas that can be converted into liquid fuels," said Mark A. Agee, president of the Oklahoma-based company.

"For us, the normalisation of relations between the United States and Iran would offer the opportunity to work together," he added.

Conoco Inc. on Tuesday called bluntly for the lifting of the sanctions.

"One policy that needs to change, of course, is the use of unilateral economic sanctions as a foreign-policy tool," Conoco's president and chief executive officer Archie Dunham told delegates at the conference which ends Thursday.

"Conoco is ready to return to Iran as soon as sanctions are lifted," added Mr. Dunham, whose company had to give up a major contract to develop the Sirri offshore oil field, in 1995. The deal finally went to Total SA of France.

The U.S. Iran-Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 imposing sanctions on foreign companies investing more than $40 million annually in Iran or Libya did not prevent Total from undertaking another large project in Iran.

Together with Russia's gas giant Gazprom and Malaysia's state-firm Petronas, Total signed a $2 billion deal to develop the South Pars gas field, ignoring the threat of U.S. sanctions.

"We are not pulling out," said Mohammad Idris Mansor, senior vice president of Petronas.

Party politics spark row in Sudan, rebels say junta crumbling

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Some Sudanese parliamentarians voiced outrage at Islamist pressure to have them reject a multiparty system, while a rebel spokesman said the junta was about to fall, the press said Wednesday.

The political row in the national assembly formed under President Omar Al Bashir's military regime arose on Tuesday when Islamist leaders demonstrated against any constitutional move towards pluralism.

In a move welcomed by some assembly members, Muslim scholars, preachers and imams handed Parliamentary Speaker Hassan Al Tourabi — seen as the eminence grise behind the Bashir regime — a memorandum stating that a return to multiparty politics would "spark a social conflict."

The demonstrators burst into the parliament building during a debate on the draft constitution, the official Al Gumhouria daily reported Wednesday, adding that some MPs took up slogans such as "No to partisanship, no to sectarianism, 100 per cent yes to Islam!"

Other MPs, however, expressed anger at the move, notably the outspoken Abdul Latif Hilali, who declared that the demonstration was "a rejected means for pressuring and influencing the deputies," adding that it "constitutes a violation of the immunity of members of parliament."

Another deputy, Salah Al Ghali, who was also quoted by Al Gumhouria, said that since the Islamist demonstration had been permitted, "other people should be allowed to express their opinion in the same manner."

However, the political row in Khartoum came as a spokesman for rebels who have been fighting for some 15 years to end Islamist domination of the mainly animist and Christian south warned that President Bashir's junta was, in any case, on the point of being overthrown.

Pagan Amun, a member of the national executive council of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), told the international Arabic Al Hayat daily that: "I can affirm that we are at the last stage before the ousting of the Sudanese regime."

Mr. Amun added, in an interview published by the paper, that a meeting due on Wednesday of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which groups the northern opposition and southern rebels, would consider "the strengthening of military action and the implementation of plans which have been drawn up to oust the government and reach Khartoum."

Blair backs his foreign secretary as he devises own visit to Israel

LONDON (AFP) — British Prime Minister Tony Blair rushed Wednesday to the defence of his Foreign Secretary Robin Cook at the centre of a diplomatic row over his current visit to Israel.

He declared through his spokesman that he backed Cook "totally," reaffirmed his own plans to visit Israel next month and tried to take the heat out of the row by maintaining that relations between London and Tel Aviv were good and would remain so.

Mr. Cook's trip has been mired in controversy over his visit to the Jewish settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arab east Jerusalem, and has been called an unequivocal diplomatic disaster in the British press.

Mr. Blair's official spokesman made it clear Wednesday the premier would not be running an identical programme to Mr. Cook though which places he would visit had not been worked out as the trip was still in the planning stage.

Mr. Cook and his party had behaved in accordance with the planning arrangements that had been made and had Mr. Blair's total backing, said the spokesman.

Jewish settlements on land which Palestinians claim as their own was "an issue within the peace process which, as the presidency of the European Union (EU), we are seeking with the Americans to give a kick start to."

Britain remained determined to play whatever positive role it could in pushing the peace process forward. At a recent meeting of foreign ministers in Edinburgh the EU announced with fanfare that it was stepping up its diplomatic initiatives in liaison with the United States. But the Conservative opposition and the influential The Times newspaper doubted whether these objectives could now be achieved. Conservative foreign affairs spokesman David Faber said the foreign secretary had a "cack-handed approach to foreign diplomacy" and managed to "court controversy wherever he goes." He referred to the row which erupted around Mr. Cook after Queen Elizabeth II's visit last year to Pakistan and India.

While in Pakistan, Mr. Cook was reported to have offered British mediation in the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan, a move which infuriated New Delhi and soured the rest of the queen's visit to India.

The outcry in Britain which followed forced both Mr. Blair and later Buckingham Palace to express publicly their support for Mr. Cook. This time, said Mr. Faber, "his clumsiness has infuriated the Israelis and brought an extraordinary snub from Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu himself. This will be particularly embarrassing for Tony Blair."

He said: "Mr. Cook's cack-handed approach to international diplomacy — so elegantly displayed in India — has resulted in the Israelis now saying his initiative is dead in the water.

"Mr Cook wants to help but he seems incapable of going anywhere without upsetting his hosts," he said.

Mr. Netanyahu cancelled a dinner with Mr. Cook. But the foreign secretary dismissed this by saying in undiplomatic terms, "I have to say that I have had three very good meals since I arrived in the Middle East. Being spared a fourth meal is a mercy."

The Foreign Office admitted the Jabal Abu Ghneim incident was an "unfortunate development," but felt that the "Israeli response has been rather out of proportion to what happened."

A spokesman said that problems appeared to have been caused when Mr. Cook shook hands with a Palestinian official at the site. "Mr. Cook saw it as a natural courtesy but it didn't constitute a briefing which he said he would not take," he said.

But The Times said Mr. Cook's handling of the Jabal Abu Ghneim visit would severely embarrass Mr. Blair ahead of his own visit and described the foreign secretary's trip as an "unequivocal disaster." It had given the impression that British foreign policy was made in Brussels, not London, and had retarded the EU's prospects for becoming a substantial player in the peace process, said the paper.

"Subtlety on matters of extreme diplomatic sensitivity has not proved Robin Cook's strongest point," it said.

U.S. reaffirms 'great confidence' in Cook

WASHINGTON (R) — The United States said on Tuesday it had great confidence in British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's efforts to promote Middle East peace but had not been consulted on his visit to a new Israeli settlement site.

The State Department said it hoped the uproar in Israel over Mr. Cook's visit on Tuesday to the Jabal Abu Ghneim site on the edge of Arab east Jerusalem would end with Israeli and Palestinian leaders deciding that it was time to move forward on peace.

Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu's office said he cut short a meeting with Mr. Cook and cancelled a joint dinner after Mr. Cook surveyed Jabal Abu Ghneim — known to Jews as Har Homa — with a Palestinian legislator.

State Department spokesman James Rubin said Secretary of State Madeleine Albright "has great confidence in [Cook] personally and in the intentions that he is pursuing at the request of the European Union to visit Israel and to try to promote peace in the region."

But Mr. Rubin said the United States was "not consulted on the specific itinerary of the trip that he took."

"We were not involved in the decision to go [to Jabal Abu Ghneim]," he told a news briefing. "This is an issue between the British, the Israelis and the Palestinians."

Mr. Rubin's comments toned down slightly a remark he made on Monday, when, asked if Mr. Cook's visit to Jabal Abu Ghneim would "help settle things down" in the region, he said: "It doesn't look that way."

U.S. officials also said on Monday they had warned Mr. Cook the visit could be controversial and overshadow other aspects of his Middle East tour.

But Mr. Rubin said on Tuesday: "We hope that when the fallout [from Mr. Cook's trip] is complete that the leaders in the region see the need to move forward on making the hard decisions."

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have been stalled since Israel broke ground a year ago at the Jabal Abu Ghneim site for a Jewish settlement.

Mr. Rubin declined further comment, joking that Mr. Cook had not commented on a disastrous visit that Ms. Albright, Defence Secretary William Cohen and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger made to Ohio last month to promote U.S. policy on Iraq.

The three officials were heavily heckled by anti-war protesters at Ohio State University in Columbus.

A year later, Abu Ghneim has no houses but still sparks controversy

by Lee Keath
Agence France Presse

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — A year after Israel began work on the Har Homa Jewish settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arab east Jerusalem, not a single house has yet been built, but the project can still raise a political storm at the centre of the deadlocked peace process with the Palestinians.

When bulldozers broke ground on the hill on Jerusalem's southern edge a year ago Wednesday, the Palestinians walked out of negotiations with Israel and there was widespread international condemnation of the new settlement in the occupied Arab sector of Jerusalem.

Most infrastructure work was completed last year, but Israel has yet to begin on the next phase, construction of the 6,500 units for Jews planned on the hill, known to Palestinians as Jabal Abu Ghneim.

Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu has vowed to complete the project, insisting on Israel's right to build in Arab east Jerusalem, which it occupied and illegally annexed in 1967 as part of its "unified capital."

But Israeli nationalists have accused him of bending to demands by the United States, Europe and the Palestinians to freeze construction in order to revive the still-deadlocked peace process.

Even without bulldozers at work, the project is a ready stage for political uproar, as shown when British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook entered the scene on Tuesday.

But Mr. Netanyahu's government has yet to give the green light for construction of the first phase of 1,000 new units on Jabal Abu Ghneim, although the roads, electricity and water systems have been completed for three months.

"I don't know what the delay is. But we have the intention to build this neighbourhood and there is going to be construction of apartments for young couples" on the site, said Mr. Netanyahu's press adviser David Bar-Illan.

Tenders for unit construction at Jabal Abu Ghneim were originally to have been issued in December. But this has been repeatedly delayed by what the government described as "technical difficulties."

Moshe Eilat, an adviser in the housing ministry, said the ministry hopes to begin issuing tenders "in a few weeks." But he said an exact date has not been set.

Right-wing Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert threatened in February to put political pressure on Mr. Netanyahu to start building if construction did not begin "in a reasonable time."

For Mr. Olmert and other right-wingers, the settlement is a litmus test for Mr. Netanyahu's commitment to a "united Jerusalem."

The status of Jerusalem is due to come under negotiation in long-delayed talks on a final peace accord with the Palestinians, who want to make Arab east Jerusalem the capital of a future state.

The Palestinians say the settlement would complete a "wall" of 11 Jewish settlements built around Arab east Jerusalem since 1967, separating Arab east Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

"Jabal Abu Ghneim is the symbol of our problems in the peace process. This is not peace when Israel can go forward with taking our land and dividing our cities," said Salah Taamari, a Palestinian Legislative Council member who has led protests against the settlement and met with Mr. Cook at the site.

CoLUMN

Gadget aims to foil Taiwan's peeping Toms

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan's high-tech "peeping Toms" may have met their match in the form of a pocket-sized device designed to detect pornographers' hidden cameras. The "Discovery I" device detects radio waves emitted by the remote-control cameras that criminals have installed in some hotel rooms, toilets and department store fitting rooms to spy on unsuspecting patrons. Pictures taken by such cameras of couples having sex or women trying on garments are widely available in Taiwan's underground pornography market. Several cases have come to light in Taiwan recently in which people have bought pornographic videotapes, only to discover themselves as the featured attraction.

Scientist comes up with sperm-friendly underwear

MELBOURNE (R) — Australian scientists have teamed up with an underwear company to tackle the hot issue of male infertility with cool, sperm-friendly boxer shorts. Monash University's Institute of Reproduction and Development launched the new "air conditioned" underpants on Wednesday. Unlike normal boxer shorts, known to be kinder on sperm than tight and sweaty briefs, the new cotton garments provide an inner mesh lining for a snug fit, the institute said. "Some men I see with tight underwear don't like wearing boxer shorts because they don't like the freedom, the loose feel," said institute director, Professor David De Kretser.

'Cleopatra,' not 'Titanic' most expensive film ever

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Weighing in at some $200 million, the current blockbuster film "Titanic" is the most expensive Hollywood movie ever made, right? Wrong, says the April issue of Vanity Fair magazine. In terms of 1998 dollars, the dubious honour goes to "Cleopatra," the 1963 saga on the Nile starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. The four-hour drama cost $300 million and, unlike "Titanic," barely paid its bills and nearly caused the Fox studios to go belly-up, the magazine says.

Luxury U.S. movie theatre to offer free popcorn

CHICAGO (R) — A luxury movie theatre that pampers film-goers with champagne and appetisers opens next month near Chicago — and the popcorn is free. General Cinema plans an April 3 premiere of the Bruce Willis action film "Mercury Rising" for its 70-seat theatre at the New York town 18 complex. For $15 a ticket, guests will drive to a private entrance, have their cars parked by a valet, go to a lounge where they can purchase champagne, wine, beer, appetisers like spinach and artichoke dip, then be seated in extra-wide leather seats with ample leg room. Viewers can also have as much free popcorn as they want.

'Primary Colours' causes buzz in New York

NEW YORK (AFP) — The stars of "Primary Colours," the story of a sex-crazed southern governor who runs for president, got quizzed at a premiere about President Bill Clinton's latest and very similar troubles. John Travolta and Emma Thompson, who play Governor Jack Stanton and his wife, had little to say that was critical of the president. "He's an amazing human being," said Travolta. Thompson said she was avoiding news reports about White House sex-and-perjury troubles.